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Nora Creina

By M^{rs} Hungerford

THE AUTHOR OF

"MOLLY BAWN"





NORA CREINA.

A Novel.

BY

MRS. HUNGERFORD,

AUTHOR OF

"MOLLY BAWN," "PHYLLIS," "NOR WIFE, NOR MAID,"
"APRIL'S LADY," "A CONQUERING HEROINE," Etc.

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Dedication.

TO

MARY HAMILTON,

THAT SWEETEST OF ALL NAMES,

WITH MY LOVE.



NORA CREINA.

CHAPTER I.

" Oh, the red rose shineth rare,
And the lily saintly fair,
But my shamrock, one in three,
Takes the inmost heart of me."

" "OH, my Nora Creina, dear, My own, my artless, Nora Creina, Nature's dress is loveliness, The dress you wear, my Nora Creina," sings Sophie gaily.

"I always look on that as a most immoral song," says Nora, regarding her sister with strong disapproval—at all events with disapproval as strong as the shaky old apple branch on which she is so imprudently reclining will allow. "Just think what would happen if one *did* go about like that."

"Thinking is superfluous," says Sophie, "when one knows. A demon policeman would at once enter from the right and carry you off to Ward 120, or 190, or something. At all events they'd put you in the lock-up. That's the worst of law and order. Nobody can be the least little bit original nowadays without——"

"Without incurring public censure, true!" says Nora with a sigh. "But anyway I wish you would not sing that hateful song *at* me! I *have* a few rags on," with a rueful glance at the old blue, washed-out linen she is wearing, that is so considerably the worse for the wearing, and that shows such an unkindly longing to give way at the elbows. "So I don't see why I am to be accused of indecency. Sometimes I wish I had not been christened Nora, and *certainly* I wish that song had never been written."

"Why?" asks Sophie, who is sitting upright on a branch opposite to her (they have climbed into the very heart of the ancient apple tree), and who is so enveloped in leaves that she has to peer through them to see her sister's face.

A face well worth a glance! well worth a thousand glances.

"Why? As if you didn't know. As if you didn't hear every one dinning it into my ears morning, noon, and night. Not a single man comes into this place without quoting it to me."

"I'm glad it is only the *single* men," puts in Sophie demurely.

"One would think," goes on Nora, leaning forward in the rashest way, the branch creaking beneath her, "that there wasn't another girl of my name in the world! I tell you if this persecution is to last, I'll *change* my name."

"Well, I don't blame you," says Sophie mildly. "I confess *I* should like to get married too. Life in this old roost promises to be anything but pleasant presently."

"Married! Who's talking of getting married? Nonsense!" says Miss Carew indignantly. "*I* don't want to get married. I only meant that I should change my Christian name. I shall get re-christened some way or other, and bury the obnoxious Nora, as in story books those unpleasant people with feathers in their hair bury the hatchet."

"Is that all?" says Sophie. She stirs, and settles herself more luxuriously on the treacherous perch. "It isn't much," says she.

"Not to you, perhaps. But to me——"

"Who has been vexing you lately, Noll?" asks Sophie, glancing at her sister keenly. "Cyril?"

"Cyril! *No!*" As the elder Miss Carew says this she leans quickly back and so brings a branch between her and her sister's somewhat too decided, if kindly gaze. "If—if you must know, it was Mr. Carnegie. Yesterday at Aunt Maria's, he, too, called me 'Nora Creina.' Very rude *I* thought."

"Not more rude of him than of Cyril."

"Oh! Cyril! Why Cyril is a sort of a cousin, and quite an old friend."

"Mr. Carnegie is an old friend too, by all accounts."

"Very old certainly—but as to being a friend——"

"It appears he knew us long ago, when we were little children—before he left Ireland."

"Did he?" indifferently. "I don't remember him."

"I confess I don't either, but I suppose he *did* know us

then, as he lived here until the death of his father, old Lord Connamore. After all you know I think I *can* remember him."

"So can I." Nora laughs as if at some inward thought. "It seems so funny about Mr. Carnegie *having* a father," says she.

"Does it? Most people have one."

"Yes, but he looks as if he might be his own father."

"I don't see that," says Sophie. "He is not so very dilapidated in appearance as all that comes to. He is not so really old. In spite of his grave air——"

"Grave-yard air!"

"——He can't be more than forty."

"Ah! *Do* make it twenty!" entreats Nora.

"Well! Aunt Maria says he is only thirty-three."

"Aunt Maria, as we all know, would say anything."

"Still, he hasn't a grey hair in his head."

"I wonder what dye he uses," says Nora. At this both girls laugh involuntarily.

"Well, malign him as you will, I shall stick to my own opinion. And I am glad he has come back to that nice old place. His eyes are kind—*so* kind. He looks as if he couldn't *nag*!"

"Oh! I daresay!"—Nora sighs. "That's a point *we* can appreciate," says she. "Sir Fell can nag with a vengeance!"

"Don't start that subject!" says Sophie, "if you regard your life! A very *little* storm would reduce this tree to firewood, and it would be anything but a little storm if I once began to state my private views of Sir Fell! Talk of the typical Step-father! Those old idiots who wrote about the orphans' woes, and their sufferings at the hands of step-parents had never known Sir Fell! There! let him rest! If indeed he ever *can* rest with the burden of his iniquities so full upon him. We were talking of—of what, Nora?"

"Who can remember?" says Nora indolently.

"I can. Of Mr. Carnegie and Cyril, and"—mischievously—"Nora Creina."

"Oh! *don't*," says Nora.

"As for Cyril! A 'sort of cousin' you call him! Well, for my part I am glad he is only a 'sort of cousin.' I don't much care for him, do you?"

Here Sophie makes a second attempt to see her sister's

face, and this time succeeds ; if Nora had been trying again to baffle her, she had given up the attempt in good time (finding it to be hopeless), and now regards Sophie with an artless smile.

"To 'much care' for a person—that means *so much* !" says she. "And as for you—I thought you did not care for Cyril at all."

"Oh ! well. He is passable enough—sometimes, even, I think him *possible*. Do you know, Nora, the funny thing about Cyril is that I am never quite sure whether I do or do not like him."

"Ah ! That is so natural !" says Nora, picking off a green leaf and letting it drop lightly to the ground ; she leans over to watch its descent, thus her face is lost again to view.

"What is ?" asks Sophie directly.

"Why, the not being sure—the uncertainty."

"Well, there's one thing quite sure ; *he* thinks he's in love with you !"

"I wish to goodness, Sophie, you would mind your own business," says Nora, now of her own accord letting her sister see her face. A rather pale face too. "Whatever Cyril *thinks*, is nothing to me. He is my very good friend, and I am his. Let it rest there."

"I wish it would," says Sophie.

"It *does*."

"Then what's the meaning of his sitting in your pocket all day long ; and staring at you as if you had seven heads ?"

"Perhaps that is it," with a rather uneasy laugh. "Perhaps he regards me as a natural curiosity. Monsters are much regarded."

"It is not that," says Sophie. "It is because he regards your one head as a marvel of beauty."

"Sophie !"

"Tut ! My good child, what's the good of posing, to *me* ? To pretend you don't know Cyril is in love with you ?"

"Or 'thinks' he is !" (Evidently that word had rankled !)

"Just so," coolly. "To pretend that, to me."

"Well—supposing he *is* in love with me, what then ?" asks Nora, rather defiantly.

"Nothing I hope!" imperturbably.

Nora's little fragile figure seems to shrink backwards. Her eyes fall to her hands, clasped lightly in her lap. Even thus, with her wonderful eyes hidden, she is altogether beautiful!

Heredity has done many things for Nora Carew! The Desmonds, the O'Connors, the Des Veauxs, were all famed for their beauty, and of them are Nora's ancestors. From the flowers of their charms she seems to have culled the sweetest colours and the choicest sweets. Like a fair, priceless lily—fragile, slender, exquisite—she stands apart, the very type of beauty perfected.

Her face is as pure as dew, as clear as sunlight, and lovely beyond words. The girl herself hardly knows how good she is to look at. Such eyes! Such lips! The eyes so dark and blue! The lips so gay, so sad! And the bright nut-brown hair so full of lights and shades.

It is a very colourless little face, yet healthy in its pallor, the white of it being soft, like cream. And she is such a little creature! Such a tiny girl! Too slight almost for living—yet not too slight to distract the hearts of men, and set them thinking. A most slender maiden, with eyes—deep Irish eyes—set in such sweet surroundings, and with a heart too big for her flower-like body—though up to this she is hardly aware that her heart is thus arranged for sorrow, and is only just awakening to the fact that she has a heart at all in this sweet, fragile frame of hers.

Just now the long dark lashes lying on her cheeks look like shadows, her lips are tremulous—the sun glinting through the gnarled old apple tree is turning her locks to gold.

"No man there is but knows—
Her face was white . . .
In no wise lacked there any praise at all
To her most perfect and pure maidenhood:
No sin I think there was in all her blood."

Suddenly she lifts her head.

"Why do you say that, Sophie?" says she. Her delicate cheek has caught a soft flush, her eyes are full of tears. When Nora's eyes grow full of tears, misery falls on the beholder.

"I don't know," says Sophie contritely, giving in at once, and feeling herself something very little less than an

assassin. "You're awfully mad with me now, Nollie; I know you are; you're *always* angry when I say a word against Cyril. And, like the parrot, I am sorry I spoke, but——"

She breaks off abruptly. She half rises on her bending branch. Her eyes express terror. Nora too makes a movement, and clinging to the trunk of the tree stares downwards and sideways towards the small moss-grown path that runs almost at their feet. Beyond it, making a private entrance to the garden, is a tall, narrow iron gate, overhung with ivy, and through this, Nora's horrified eyes see two men coming.

"It's *them*!" says she, regardless of grammar, throwing up her head, and gazing at Sophie as if petrified.

CHAPTER II.

"O Paddy, dear, and did you hear
The news that's going round?"

"So it is," says Sophie airily. "I was so afraid it was Sir Fell. Let's get down." Here she makes an attempt to put one foot on the branch below her.

"Sophie," says Nora, catching her gown. "Are you mad? To go down like *this*!" pointing to her gown. "Oh! you *must* be mad."

"Nonsense!" says Sophie. "Why it is only Bobbie and Cyril. Here! come along." Sophie is evidently most ambitious to return to mother earth, and makes another step in that direction. But Nora holds her firmly.

"Bobbie is one thing," says she. "He is our real cousin and as good as our brother, but Cyril——! Oh! Sophie, *don't*. I *can't* go down; and if you do, they will know I am here. And there is a great big tear in my frock just at the end of the skirt! I did it when climbing up. Oh! *why* did I climb up? It is in *ribbons*! Sophie," seeing even still an intention on the latter's part to descend. "If you go down now, I'll *never forgive you*!"

"But why?" demands the younger Miss Carew impatiently. "Can't you hold up your skirt. I'm sure if Bobbie saw me with my skirt in ribbons, or," thoughtfully, "without a skirt *at all*! he would like me all the same. Can't you tuck it up? I do want to see Bobbie! I've

something to say to him, and I know he has something to say to me ; and——”

“Go down then !” says Nora, loosing her hold of her sister’s frock and drawing back her lissome figure as far as she can.

“Oh ! we all know what that means,” says Sophie. “Treachery and desertion. Of course I shan’t desert you, and you know that. But I must say, Nora, that I think you are something of a fool ! Yes, you *are* ! It’s rude, if you like, but I keep to it.” Sophie’s wrath, though expressed in a whisper, is exceedingly strong.

“A fool !”

“Yes. You’re afraid of him ! You’re afraid of Cyril ! You think he won’t go *on* loving you, if he sees you out of ‘silk attire’ ; that he will fail to appreciate you if you don’t look your best ! What a fair-weather friend ! I should hate a man if I thought he liked me only for my good looks or my frocks, or——”

“Be silent, Sophie !” says Nora.

Her face is very white. She has put up her hand. There is a certain dignity in her air. Sophie draws back.

“You say very queer things,” says Nora gently, but still with her face so very white. “You do not understand perhaps. And—at all events be silent ! They—they will hear you if you speak again.”

Indeed “they” are just now beneath the apple tree.

The girls sitting in the branches of it, in lieu of the orthodox hammocks they are not so happy as to possess, grow suddenly rigid. Underneath them, on the narrow path, are the new-comers. At that point in the path that brings them almost abreast of the apple tree they have paused—to finish an argument apparently.

“Well, I’m sure there is some truth in it,” says the taller of the two.

“Perhaps,” says his companion indifferently.

This latter is a young man of about five feet nine or ten inches, with a quizzical eye. His nose is distinctly *retroussé* and his mouth is large. It would be impossible even for a girl in love with him to call him a beauty. He has, however, his compensations. For even the girl who is *not* in love with him would certainly declare him as loveable a fellow as there is alive. Denis Butler if a first cousin of the Carews ; and having been left by his defunct

parents the noble income of three hundred a year, is living (when at home) a somewhat embarrassed, but wholly happy existence, in an old barn, called "Banks," about two miles from Dunmore. He has just been called to the Bar.

His companion is of middle height also, and a little taller than Denis Butler, but without the quizzical eye. *His* eye indeed is fraught with melancholy, and something underneath that, that is perhaps even more characteristic. Some people, girls especially, think his glance thoughtful. It is so nice to look thoughtful! There are, however, a few other people who have fancied it speculative. There is a difference, of course. Cyril Ferris, in spite of his melancholy eyes, or perhaps because of them, is beyond all question handsome. Friends and foes alike admit that.

"Yes. Everyone is talking about it," says he, continuing his first remark as he and Denis Butler came to a standstill almost under the apple tree.

"If people didn't talk they'd die," says Denis contemptuously.

At this point Sophie, at the risk of her life, leans towards her sister.

"It is *frightful*!" whispers she. "It is *mean*. We can *hear* them."

"Put your fingers in your ears," whispers back Nora, suiting the action to the word; and then, an after thought occurring to her, "and shut your eyes."

Sophie, though raging, complies with both commands. It is, however, impossible for anyone under a Spartan boy to keep one's eyes and ears shut for more than two minutes at a stretch, when you know that people are conversing under a tree about two yards from you. For one thing, you always want to know whether they have gone away, because then, of course, you need not stuff your fingers into your ears, or tighten up your lids any longer, and nobody wants to be deaf and blind longer than necessary. Sophie, after the regulation two minutes, unlocks her eyes and gives a judicious peep. At the same moment she gives her ears full play. Her hands fall into her lap. She is now staring with all her might. A word or two from below has travelled up to her.

In the midst of her treachery, however, she remembers Nora and her commands. Guiltily she glances in her

sister's direction to find Nora—Nora the virtuous!—with both *her* hands clasped round a bough of the apple tree, and her eyes wide—*very* wide—open.

Their glances meet through the leaves.

"You are *listening*!" breathes Nora indignantly.

"Well, so are *you*!" whispers back Sophie, with indignation greater still. At which, after a struggle with their dignity, they both give way to voiceless mirth that shakes up the old apple tree, to their terror, though that staunch old friend is too good-natured to give them away.

Meantime the voices from below grow louder. Their owners have come a few steps nearer to the tree.

"I'm positive he means business," says Cyril Ferris, evidently *à propos* of the conversation already begun before the girl's ears had been barricaded.

"Well—perhaps," says Butler, who has apparently been led by argument to almost believe in this thing, whatever it is. The girls up above, though in agonies of dismay at being thus caught in a *cul de sac* as it were, cannot help wondering who "he" is, and what it is all about. "It would be of no consequence at all if it weren't for the girls."

"The girls—yes," says Ferris. He moves forward and proceeds to light a match on the trunk of the old tree. Both the girls grow livid. It is too late now to disclose their position, and if discovered! Nora half unconsciously tightens the tail of her gown round her feet, and tells herself that life is *not* worth living. Sophie, grows hysterical. "If this marriage of Sir Fell's comes off, the girls will be all right I suppose?" continues Ferris, having now got his cigar in order; as he says this, he looks at the cigar rather than his companion.

"How all right?" asks Butler. "They can't get away from him you know. He is their guardian; their mother left them to him when dying; rather a mistake on her part."

"Horrid mistake," says Ferris sympathetically. "A good thing they will have money of their own."

"Right good! Even though they have to wait for it."

"Wait?"

"Well, not so long, only until they are twenty-five; or until Sir Fell dies. In the meantime——"

"Ah!—In the meantime?"

"They are under his guardianship unless they marry to please him. I'm afraid," says Butler with a rather rueful laugh, "that poor suitors will have a small chance until that age has been reached."

"Ridiculous arrangement!" says Ferris, letting the smoke sail slowly upwards in the quiet air, and watching it until it gets high above his head.

Now indeed it *is* high above his head; slowly, lazily through the branches of the apple tree it goes, and Ferris's eyes, following it, catch suddenly sight of something.

What is it? A glimpse of blue—the whiteness of a small, lovely hand grasping a branch. His eyes come down to mother earth instantly (though without criminating haste), and indeed there is nothing in his pale, melancholy face to betray to his companion or anyone the fact of his having seen anything beyond a few green leaves and the flight of his cigar-smoke heavenwards.

"After all," says he calmly, though one who knew him might have noticed that now a touch of sentiment (hitherto out of it), has entered into his tone: "*Why* ridiculous? They are so charming that they need not think of money, as belonging to themselves."

"That's all very well," says Butler, "But I don't see why if a girl *has* money she should be kept out of it for ever."

"Not for ever. Only until she is twenty-five you say. You see, I, being only a second cousin, know nothing about these monetary affairs, and I am glad of it too. I *want* to know nothing. The girls in themselves are *so* delightful, that one does not even dream of money in connection with them. They don't want it."

"True!" says Butler heartily.

"No matter how small or large it may be—their fortunes I mean."

"It's small enough," says Butler, shaking his head. "I wish it was more, for the poor girl's sakes, but five thousand each isn't anything worth talking about in these days you know. Still it will make them a bit independent; and—*and besides*," slowly and very reluctantly, as though some hidden thought is troubling him, "*and besides*, they may—*make*—good marriages."

"Dear fellow, the best of all marriages is the one that has love in it," says Ferris, giving Butler a resounding, most

amiable, slap between his shoulders : "Love ! Love is a conjuror," cries he—all his melancholy seems suddenly to have taken flight. "It will carry a man through most things : Give me a charming wife minus a penny, and I should thank the gods. What is money ? Dross ! mere dross !"

"Do you know," says Butler smiling, "I am glad now to hear you talk like that." Butler has the nicest suspicion of a brogue possible ; a touch of it, that being wedded to a cultivated mind makes his voice like satin : "I fancied you a fellow to whom money would, or might, have meant a great deal."

"Ah ! that's how one gets mistaken," says Ferris, smiling. "And so if—if this marriage of Sir Fell's comes off, it will not interfere with——"

"No. It will not interfere with them, except with regard to their personal comfort for the time being."

"Ah !" says Ferris. "Come on, old man, perhaps if we walk a little farther on, we may meet with them."

"Perhaps. But I daresay they are up at Castle Saggart," says Butler. "However, we may as well stroll about a bit, as nobody is at home."

"Sir Fell of *course* is not," says Ferris, laughing. He tucks his arm into Butler's and leads him along the path, always in a laughing fashion, and with a merry word here and there, until they are well out of earshot of the apple tree. "Those poor girls," says he, then suddenly, with the utmost sympathy, "they won't like a stepmother I'm afraid. But it won't be for long you say——"

"What won't ?"

"The ending of a stepmother's tyranny," with a light laugh. "Though of course she may turn out a swan. They will get their five thousand each on their twenty-fifth birthday, you say that too, don't you ?" with a languid lifting of the speculative eyes. "That can't mean a very lengthened martyrdom. Miss Carew must be——"

"Nineteen," says Butler, looking at him.

"A charming age. And her sister ?"

"Eighteen !" If Butler's tone had been surprised before it is distinctly hostile now.

CHAPTER III.

"Of cares and troubles, sure, we've all our share;
The finest summer isn't always fair."

SOPHIE pushing the branches aside looks carefully down. The dying away of the voices as the two young men disappeared down the garden path, has reassured her.

"They are gone!" says she. She looks up at her sister. Something in Nora's eyes—her whole face—something radiant and new and lovely startles her. "Good gracious, how glad you are that they are gone!" says she. "After all I don't believe you really"—pausing, and examining her sister's face—"really like him."

"Don't you?" says Nora. She raises herself and draws a long breath. "It was dreadful, wasn't it?" says she, laughing softly beneath her breath. "One could not move: I feel cramped. I am sure I must look like a martyr."

"You look as I have said, *glad!*" says Sophie, who has not taken her eyes off her.

"Well, I am glad," says Nora. "Why should I not be? To be on thorns, for so long, and now to be released! It is enough to make anyone glad!"

She says it all quite easily, quite lightly. And indeed it is the truth she speaks. She *is* glad; though perhaps the cause of her gladness is not the one that Sophie has suggested. Some words are still ringing in her ears. "Love! Love is a conjuror! Money! What is money? Dross, mere dross!" Oh! how *his* voice had rung! Even now the quiet air seems full of it. Those perfect words seem to resound from tree to tree.

"We may as well get down now," says Sophie discontentedly.

"Wait—wait a moment," says Nora. "They can't be gone yet. They are walking round the garden."

"Perhaps they went out at the big door," says Sophie. "I'll look."

"I'll look too," says Nora. They both bend forward, and then instantly as if struck draw back again.

"I told you so," says Nora. "They are walking about, looking at the garden."

"They are looking for *us*!" says Sophie. "Oh! what can your dress matter, Nora? *Do* let us go down; we can quite easily slip in by the iron gate, and they will suspect nothing."

"No." She pauses. "It is only one day, after all," says she, impatiently, "I suppose you can live without Denis for one day!"

"No, I can't," says Sophie promptly, impervious even to this insinuation. "All the days are so frightfully dull, that I can't afford to lose anything out of them. And Denis is the one person in Saggartmore whom I care to meet. I"—looking steadily at her sister—"am not a bit ashamed of liking him."

"I don't see why you should be," says Nora, quite as steadily, whilst flushing faintly. "Why should one not like one's friends? And both Denis and—and Cyril—are our friends!"

"One friend is enough for me," says Sophie rather uncompromisingly.

"Well, that leaves the other for me," says Nora, smiling a little sadly at her. There is a short silence, and then Nora, who evidently bears no ill-will (When indeed did Nora *ever* bear ill-will?), lays her hand on her sister's arm. "Sophie," says she, "what did they mean?"

"When?"

"Just at first. 'He means business,' they said; and afterwards—did you hear? 'If this marriage of Sir Fell's comes off.' *His* marriage: Good gracious, Sophie, can his late frequent visits to the Lacys really mean anything?"

"Those vulgar Lacys! Why it is only a month ago since he forbade us to call there again, or to be intimate with them."

"No doubt, there was reason in that too, if—*if* there is any truth in this gossip about that woman who is staying there; she is a cousin of the Lacys, is she not? An English woman: *quite* old, Aunt Maria says."

"As old as the hills. As old as Aunt Maria herself. Oh! of course it isn't true. But yet, to forbid *us* to go to Lacy Hall, and then to go there himself *as* regularly as the day dawns? That (what was it they said?) *must* 'mean business.' He—"solemnly—"is certainly up to something, Nora."

"He is always up to something," says Nora gloomily.

"Dark ! very dark ! There is no getting at him," says Sophie. "I agree with you there."

"Fancy his thinking of getting married again !" says Nora. "Do you know, yesterday, when I was here watching Daddledy earthing the cauliflowers, he said something to me about Sir Fell and that Miss Baxter."

"What did he say ?" now all eager attention.

"It is hardly worth repeating, only that Daddledy knows *everything*. He said first something about Sir Fell being well out of the way these times, as he knew as much about gardening as a cockatoo, and then he said : 'They do say miss as that Miss Baxther, up wid thim Lacys, is the divil an' all fur money.' That was all, and if it hadn't been Daddledy who said it, I——"

"I know—I know—go on."

"There's nothing to go with."

"Nothing ? Do you mean to say you let it stop there, knowing Daddledy to be the finest gossip in all the country side ? Do you mean to say," regarding her sister with distinct reproach, "that you didn't even ask him what he *meant* ? That you didn't so much as drop a disparaging word of Sir Fell with a view to drawing him out ?"

"I confess I didn't," says Nora.

"*Tch !*" says the younger Miss Carew, with fine contempt "I tell you what, Nora, you lost your chance. He was evidently *brimful* of information, and you chose to let it go by. 'An opportunity once lost is never to be regained.' You have written that over and over again in your copy-book, so that there is no excuse for you."

"I shall write a new edition of that copy-book and tack on to your truism this one : 'Therefore create another !' That takes the string out of the old one. Seriously though, Sophie, *do* you think Sir Fell means to marry that woman ?"

"Seriously, I think it seems to point that way."

"To point is vulgar," says Nora, sententiously. "Say what you mean. Oh !"—quickly—"he *can't* be thinking of such a marriage after—after mother. Of course I know we don't remember her *well*, but she was a lady at all events !"

"Why don't you say an Honourable ?" says Sophie laughing. "There, don't mind me, I'm absurd I know, and of course I agree with you !"

"That is hardly a compliment," says Nora, laughing too. "Well, what I mean is, having married mother, how he can descend to a person of *such* low birth is beyond me."

"People of low birth have nowadays so much money," says Sophie plaintively. "And money carries all before it. When one comes to look at it, Nora, what have our grand relations ever done for us? Nothing! why Lady Saggartmore is ten times as good to us as any of our own cousins have ever been."

"Oh, never mind our cousins. I don't believe they know we are alive. Let us return to Miss Baxter; she, I expect, is bound to interest us sooner or later. *She* knows we are alive, I shouldn't wonder."

"Naturally, if she is thinking of Sir Fell. I say, Nolly! Fancy *anyone* thinking of Sir Fell!"

"We think of him."

"Pouf! yes. Because we must! And *such* thoughts! I wonder he doesn't wither under them. But," Sophie laughs, "he is tough, tough as 'old J. B.' himself. I suppose if she is rich she wants to buy his title to back up her shoddy respectability. Baxter! what a name."

"Anything to do with the Bible man, I wonder."

"Very likely! She looks biblical by all account. Quite a female Patriarch!"

"Or a Croesus in petticoats. She really ought to be a man."

"She ought indeed if she intends to tackle Sir Fell."

"How I wish she was. Then she could not marry him," says Nora with a sigh. "You say she is English. I hear she is an American, and that her father made his pile over oil, or pork, or something equally delightful."

"What's in a name?" says Sophie, shrugging her shoulders. "No doubt, to Sir Fell, Miss Baxter's fortune if possessed of any other name would smell as sweet . . . as sweet as oil or pork at all events, provided it was big enough."

"Sophie! you *can* be severe! No, let's allow she is English anyway. Birmingham I think—or Manchester."

"So be it," says Sophie. "Well it comes to this, that an old fool and a rich fool get married, and there remains then but one question to be solved that interests us. What is to become of the old fool's step-children? That's a riddle. Come, answer it, Nora."

"I can find but one answer," says Nora.

"But one! and have you really found one? Oh! clever girl. Well! What is it?"

"Perhaps——" Nora pauses.

"Go on. Go on."

"Well it seems to me that—that——" again Nora stops short.

"For Heaven's sake, Nora, give up those tragical pauses," cries her sister impatiently. "'It seems,' what?"

"It seems that *we* shall have to get married too," says Nora. "Yes, we shall, Sophie, whether we like it or not; and somehow I," with a strange little glance, "I feel that I—shall not."

"It is a long day off anyway," says Sophie. "Why worry about it until it is an actual *fait accompli*. Sir Fell is not married yet, and—" she hesitates and looks at Nora. "Keep up your courage," says she tenderly.

"I have none! It is so bad at home already that to dream of worse—— And a step-mother—a woman belonging to the Lacys—It *can't* be true, Sophie."

"It is, however," says Sophie, "far better to believe in it at once. It will save time afterwards. I never felt so sure of *anything*, Nora, as that he is going to marry Miss Baxter."

"And if he does?"

"Well, *let him!*" says Sophie with a truly noble contempt. "And in the meantime we can pray that she and her dollars, or her Birmingham guineas, as the case may be, will have the effect of humanizing our Dragon! Do you," staring downwards, "think we may embrace mother earth now?"

"I think so. I hear nothing. And I see Daddledy approaching. He'll tell us if they are gone."

"I hope he'll tell us they aren't gone," says Sophie fractiously.

CHAPTER IV.

"O, where, Kincora ! is Brian the Great ?
 And where is the beauty that once was thine ?
 O, where are the princes and nobles that sate
 At the feast in thy halls, and drank the red wine ?
 Where, O, Kincora ?"

To be distinctly plump is not to be a mark for the world's scorn. Sophie Carew, though plump, is certainly not a mark for anything but universal admiration. She is indeed very much admired, perhaps even more so than her sister, who is, nevertheless, very much more beautiful than she is. To be as delicate as a summer breeze, and as colourless as a lily of the valley, is a beauty that does not commend itself to every one. Many sisters are alike. Most sisters have little common resemblances between them, but any two beings so totally dissimilar as Nora and Sophie Carew could hardly be imagined. Their cousin, Eusebius Brush, in one of his flights of poetic fancy, had christened them Jack Sprat and his wife, but Eusebius as a rule is not much attended to.

That Sophie is plump to an almost dangerous degree is not to be disputed. "Laugh and grow fat," says the old proverb. And as Sophie is always laughing, what can she expect ? She has laughed all her young life through, and there is no denying that her bones are well covered.

Her eyes are a light, soft hazel. Her fair, brown hair is curly ; her nose has a distinctly upward tendency ; her mouth is beautiful. She is very pretty in an arch and charming fashion. The beautiful mouth seems indeed made for mirth.

"Right seldom fell her face on weeping wise !
 Gold hair she had, and golden coloured eyes,
 Filled with clear light and fire and large repose."

"Daddledy ! Daddledy !" whispers Nora, leaning down her slim, lissome figure very dangerously far, as Daddledy comes towards them across the grass, his spade upon his shoulder.

He is a very little man, with bow legs and a bent back, and the sourest expression you ever yet saw on a human

countenance. His brows are shaggy and bent, and snowed by age, but from underneath them peer out two small watchful eyes, bright as a child's, and just as curious; there is, too, a touch of malice in them. Daddledy as he stands (a matter of five foot one) is an embodiment of ill-temper, discontent and general grudge.

"Verjuice," says Eusebius, "has been his daily aliment since the day he was weaned." And perhaps Eusebius so far is not altogether wrong—anathemas are always on the tongue of Daddledy.

"Daddledy!" says Nora again, but Daddledy does not hear. He comes on stolidly.

"He's stone deaf," says Nora.

"He hears as well as you do," says Sophie wrathfully. "Only he *won't*. He's as bad a person as I know. The one thing that keeps me from denouncing him is the fact that he loathes Sir Fell."

"He loathes everyone," says Nora. She makes a last attempt. She leans still further out of her airy nest, and calls once more upon the old gardener.

And once more he remains impervious to that voice, that many a better man than he, in every sense, of the word, would have rushed to answer.

Daddledy has come to a standstill quite near them. His not hearing Nora's eager whisper is therefore all the more remarkable. He seems lost in contemplation of the garden round, and a desire to hitch up his breeches.

Certainly the garden round, though rather wild in its growth, is worthy of a look or two, and so perhaps Daddledy thinks. To him it is as good as his own garden, as he has worked in it, through rain and sunshine, for a little matter of fifty years. He is now seventy, and it is with deep regret, I add, that years have not lent him grace.

It is with the air of a proprietor he glances round him. It is all his own work. *He* had planted those espalier apple trees there thirty years ago. Those taller trees standing on their own merits that line the southern walk, *fifty* years ago. The other trees, and older, were planted by his father, who had been gardener before him again at Dunmore, and who indeed had taught Daddledy his business, when Daddledy was only Thady Dinneen, and not much at that.

Some of these old apple trees are gnarled, and bent, and

moss-grown. These seem to have shed all their fragrant blossoms, whilst their younger brothers have still retained a delicate pale flower here and there—a pale flower tinged with pink. The paths, however, are covered with petals. Even so late as this, in the first week of lovely June, the apple blossoms strew the paths.

The walls all round this quiet garden are covered with drooping ivy. It falls like a shower from the top, covering the gaunt old sides as with a garment. Long since the cherry and plum trees have died away, crowded out by this lovely ivy, and by many years of disregard and carelessness and poverty. The Anketells had been good people in their time, "grand people entirely," as the peasants had it, but money had died with them as time died too, and they had waked one morning to find themselves bankrupt more or less, with no more hope of paying their own debts as of compelling their tenants to pay theirs.

They had indeed always kept open house. But that was at an end now. The house was open indeed. It threatened shortly to be open to all the winds of heaven, as the ceilings were falling in, and the roof—who was to repair *that*?

Well, the old people died, and the present man coming into his rights, and place, and home, found all things wrong. It was too late to redeem, to retrench, to sell. There was nothing for it but to live on the land and rot there.

Sir Fell was a personable man then—if one utterly dull and common-place, and heartless to a singular degree. He happened about that time to meet a young girl, one of the Macgillicudys, and hearing she had twenty thousand pounds, deliberately, slowly, and without inclination of any kind, laid siege to her. She was a very young girl, and as she was heart-whole, and he singularly distinguished in appearance, she fell an easy prey to his machinations. She died a year after the marriage, childless, making him thus a handsome present of her fortune. Not that he gained much by the transaction. He had sunk her money in his land, in drainages, and so forth, and so disastrously that he was never a penny the better for her twenty thousand pounds.

Two years later he married again. A widow this time, with two little girls, mere babies. A very pretty woman, of high birth, and with a little money: she had ten

thousand pounds. Perhaps his handsome person fascinated her also. At all events she accepted him, and brought her two little girls into the old house of Dunmore. Dying five years later, after a most unhappy time of it with Sir Fell, who was a tyrant born, she left her fortune to be equally divided between her two children. Sir Fell was to have the interest of the money until they were married; after that, the money went to the children. But they were not to marry without Sir Fell's consent until they had reached the age of twenty-five. That might mean a long, long wait for a young girl in love. Doubtless the mother on her death-bed, urged by her husband in that direction and warned by experience, had thought it wise to keep the children free from unhappy marriages as long as possible. No doubt she had done the best for them, as *she* thought, poor thing, but she had certainly left them very considerably in the power of their step-father.

* * * * *

"Daddledy!" cries Nora once again in a subdued voice, as the old man comes now right under the tree.

"Aiyeh!" says he with a start. The voices coming from above have evidently startled him. They had wronged him, he certainly had *not* heard their first appeals. He looks up in the undecided bewildered way that belongs to the old and the deaf, his face shining through the sunshine like a ribston pippin.

"It's I and Miss Sophie, Daddledy," says Nora, her charming face peeping at him through the leaves and flowers of the tree.

"So 'tis!" says Daddledy, staring up at them. And then, recovering from his surprise, and falling into his ordinary mood (which is always full of grace)—"May the devil fly away wid ye, ye bould childhren," says he. "What's ye up there for? Wan would think ye were in prison be the looks o' ye. An' worse luck it is that ye aren't. 'Tis the proper place for ye! What's girls good for, at all, at all?"

"Have they gone, Daddledy?" asks Sophie in a rather sorrowful tone.

"Gone? Who? Thim two boys? Fegs they have. An' luck go wid 'em. Not a ha'penny between 'em."

"Really gone?" asks Nora. "Then we may get down."

Whereupon both girls scramble from their lofty perches, Nora making a final rent in the old gown in the process.

"Which way did they go, Daddledy?"

"Out be the big gate beyant, afther coorsin' round this garden like greyhounds in search o' ye. Though fegs what they sees in ye!"

"Well, isn't there plenty to see?" demands Sophie, who delights in an encounter with this cross old person.

"Come, look at us, Daddledy. Aren't we lovely?"

"Troth I suppose that's what you're thinkin'—but I could never see a bit o' good in girls. What are they born for at all, at all? save for the plaguin' o' mankind."

"A special mission," says Sophie, "and a noble one. I hope I shall fulfil *my* part of it. But seriously now, Daddledy, when you were young, you must have liked a girl or two."

"Divil a wan!" says Daddledy, briefly, but eloquently. "Look here," says he, resting on his spade and regarding her with a small but glittering eye. "In my opinion it's girls and guano that have been the ruin of ould Ireland!"

"*What?*" says Sophie indignantly, who is feeling somewhat ruffled at being placed in a category with guano.

"What do you mean, Daddledy?"

"What I *says* / Girls," repeats Daddledy sternly (I regret to say he pronounces this word *girrls*), "*and* guano, has played ould Harry wid the foinest land in the worrild!"

"Nonsense!" angrily, "you don't know what you are talking about. Why——"

She stops dead short. Another voice beside Daddledy's is sounding through the air. It comes from the direction of the small iron gate. It is a raucous voice, and it calls on Nora.

"It is Sir Fell!" says the latter nervously.

CHAPTER V.

"The night is dark and dreary
A gradh geal mo chroidhe
 And the heart that loves you weary
A gradh geal mo chroidhe
 For every hope is blighted
 That bloomed when first we plighted
 Our troth, and were united
A gradh geal mo chroidhe."

"You'd better pick up your dress," says Sophie hurriedly. "It's in *bits*, and you know how he goes on when he gets the chance."

"I can't pick it *all* up," says Nora desperately. "It's gone, every way. Good gracious, Sophie, stand before me if you can! Daddledy, you've got a spade or a shovel or something, *do* try to pretend you are digging at *this* side of me."

"What is it ye want now?" asks Daddledy, sourly.

"Sir Fell's coming! Begin digging at this side." They are standing near a ready prepared drill, and Nora stations herself so as to have the worst half of her old gown next the drill.

"What?" asks Daddledy again.

"Oh! *never* mind!" says Sophie wrathfully, and indeed there is no further time for developments of *the* situation, as now Sir Fell himself comes round the gooseberry bushes.

"You heard me calling I presume?" says he, eyeing both girls with a glance as harsh as his voice.

He is a tall, spare man, of about fifty, with a long face. His forehead is high, his cheeks lank, his lips thin and a trifle cruel. His eyes are a washed-out blue. This seems a criticism that would preclude the idea of his being even ordinarily good-looking, yet as a fact Sir Fell Anketell is handsome. Handsome too, of a well bred type, and with a certain air that must be called distinguished.

"Only just now," says Nora, "this very moment."

"Deaf, eh?" sneers Sir Fell. "There is an old proverb you know."

"There are many old proverbs," says Sophie, stepping

into the breach with a bland smile. "To what particular one do you allude? 'Cows far off have long horns.'"

"I'm not a cow," says Sir Fell, darting at her a malign glance. "Besides, it is a question of hearing, not seeing, and cows have not long ears."

"True," says Sophie thoughtfully. "At least not so long as donkeys," here Nora casts at her an agonized glance. "'Out of sight out of mind,' perhaps?"

"Try again!" says Sir Fell, half closing his eyes in a fashion he has when feeling savage. "*I* am not likely to be out of sight for some time to come."

"Ah! to be personal! that is to be rude," says Sophie daringly. "I am not rude. Well," airily, "a last guess. 'Absence makes the heart grow fonder.' I hope, I *do* hope I have got it this time."

She is looking at him with quite a heavenly innocence in her large eyes, but Sir Fell has lived long enough with her to understand the undercurrents of her mischievous nature.

"I should think you must be tired of hoping," says he with his cynical smile. "I'm not going away. I fear there is as yet no chance for you, of growing fonder of *me*." Here he transfers his gaze from Sophie to the downcast Nora. Taking her in deliberately, from small, sweet, dainty head, to the tattered and torn old gown, he at length addresses her:

"In rags as usual!" says he. His tone is withering. Nora's eyes fall, and her pale face flushes, faintly, delicately:

"It was getting down out of this tree. Daddledy saw it," stammers she, in a low, nervous tone. She glances anxiously at Daddledy, as if imploring that ill-grained old man to come to her rescue.

"Fegs I did," says he. "If ye mane yer leg. But I'm thinkin' that frock o' yours was a bad job before ye decided to roost in that ould apple tree."

"*Oh!*" says Sophie, turning a burning glance on him; a glance that I'm bound to say he receives without a wince.

"So!" says Sir Fell, transfixing the unlucky Nora with a sarcastic eye. "You have been up apple trees, have you? you have torn your gown into ribbons, have you? you have no doubt been playing hide and seek with those two

young men whom I saw enter this garden about half-an-hour ago."

"Hide and seek—with—them. *No*," says Nora, trembling with indignation and the strange fear of her step-father that has always overcome her in his presence, and has rendered her doubly hateful to him.

"Hoyden and hypocrite!" says he contemptuously. "Do you think I believe you? I say I saw them come in here, those two paupers, not half-an-hour ago. Where are they now?"

"I don't know," says Nora.

"Am I to call you liar too?" cries he furiously.

"No you are not," says Sophie, calmly but with strength; she lays her hand on Nora's arm, and draws her a little behind her. "You are," gazing straight at Sir Fell "to call her no more insulting names. Do you hear? We were sitting in an apple tree just now, when Denis and Cyril Ferris went by. We did not speak to them. Only that I know Daddledy," with a scornful glance at Daddledy, who is leaning on his spade plainly enjoying himself immensely, "would rather *die* than do a good turn to any one, I should ask him to speak to the truth of this."

"Truth!" repeats Sir Fell with a sneer. "Do you ask me to believe that Nora's well-known admiration for Cyril Ferris is so poor a thing that she could let him go by her without a word? without making a sign to attract his attention? No, no! However easily he might pass *her* by, when other people—or shall we say another *person*?—is by, I feel sure *she* could never be so untrue to herself, as to deny herself the pleasure of a chance word with him."

"You——" begins Nora. She is now as white as death and her little slight fragile body is trembling cruelly.

"Not a word, Nora!" says Sophie sharply.

"Just once more," says Sir Fell, who seems to enjoy the girl's humiliation to the full—staring at her through his lowered lids, with a half-smile on his thin lips. "We are great at proverbs to-day, Sophie, are we not? Let me give you just one more, for Nora's benefit. It is like yours, without application of course. To be personal, as you say, my dear Sophie, is to be rude. I, like you, would not be rude. But—now for your proverb, Nora! Are you listening? It is the idlest thing. '*One man can bring a*

man to water, but *ten* cannot make him drink'; silly old proverb, isn't it."

"Come away, Nora!" says Sophie, slipping her arm into her sister's; she turns as she passes Sir Fell. "Are you happier now?" asks she, looking at him as if she would willingly slay him. "Has it done you good? this hurting of her sweet, kind, lovely nature."

"My good Sophie——"

"I tell you this," says she passionately, "that a time will come—it is coming for all of us—when it will do you a lot of harm!"

She is going quickly down the path with Nora, when her step-father calls to her to stop.

"I have a note for you," says he, pulling a letter out of his pocket. "It is from Lady Saggartmore I believe, I know she wants you to go up there to-morrow. And a word to you; the Lacys will probably be there, with—their friends. See that you are civil to them."

"To the Lacys? Why," lifting her dauntless eyes to his. "I thought you abhorred the Lacys. Only three months ago you forbid us to know them; and I'm sure I don't wonder at it, they *are* a vulgar set of people certainly."

"Nevertheless attend to my words," says Sir Fell, colouring angrily. "If the Lacys and their friends speak to you, be as gracious to them as an unkind nature has made it possible to you."

"In spite of their vulgarity?" asks Sophie, who can be troublesome at times, and when it pleases her.

"You have my commands," says Sir Fell, the dark flush rising to his brow, "see that you obey them." He refuses to continue the argument, a sign of defeat that Sophie joyfully acknowledges. She takes the letter from him, and she and Nora turning the corner are soon out of sight. They have come indeed to the old summer house on the top of the hill, in the garden, before Nora speaks. Then, "Oh *Sophie!*" cries she, turning suddenly to her sister; her tone is miserable, her face blanched.

"Never mind him, ducky! *Don't* mind him, Nolly! he is a witch, darling, but soon we shall be twenty-five and then we shall go away together—we——"

"It isn't true, Sophie, is it? He *does* love me. You heard what he said when we were in the apple tree?"

"Yes, I heard, Nolly darling."

"That love, love was everything. Oh!" putting up her hands to her head, "*I forget* what he said, but you *know*, Sophie, he said love was worth all the money in the world."

"I heard him indeed," says Sophie, who had been greatly impressed by Cyril's sentiments, not having expected them from him. She had heard, and yet in spite of everything her doubts of him remain.

"Sophie, *say* you think he—he—likes me better than any one else."

"Oh, he must; how could it be otherwise?"

"That is not saying it. Why do you hesitate, Sophie? *Say* you think he loves me best."

"I do think that," says Sophie, driven to bay. "Yes, yes. It is true! Who *could* he prefer to you? Everyone is in love with you, Nora. You are the prettiest girl in all this country round, and the dearest and the sweetest, and——"

"I am tired of all that," says Nora a little coldly. "I don't care to be the prettiest and dearest and sweetest girl in the world, I only want to be loved by Cyril."

"Well, and——"

"And you don't believe he loves me?"

"Oh, Nora! you will *hate* me if you go on like this. It is only, darling, that—that he is very poor, and you are poor too, and——"

"Denis is very poor, and you are very poor too, yet you think Denis loves you."

"I only think it; I'm not sure; and certainly," with a sigh, "I don't believe it will ever come to anything."

"Still you believe in him."

"Oh! Denis is a fool," says Sophie. "Never mind Denis. Come back to yourself."

"I wish Cyril was a fool," says Nora, smiling at her sister very faintly.

"If you distrust him——" begins Sophie, a little slowly, a little nervously, for indeed up to this Nora had permitted no word against Cyril Ferris to be named before her, and even now——

"I *don't*," interrupts she quietly. "I have no reason to distrust him. Only when things are said, Sophie—and you know what Sir Fell said—what he insinuated—you remember his words—'say rather when a *person* is by,'—who did he mean?"

"Darling Nolly, why dwell on his horrid words?"

"He meant Mrs. Vancourt."

"Did he?" Poor Sophie is at her wits' end.

"You know he did," with a little frown. "Are *you* going to pretend to me, Sophie? Has it gone so far as that? Is all the world pretending? Is *he* pretending?"

She stops dead short and covers her eyes with her hands.

Sophie, throwing her arms round her, kisses the backs of the little hands tenderly.

"Could you—could you give him up?" whispers she, as if half afraid. Nora, rousing herself, shakes her off.

"Ah! I am wrong," says she, "I should not have spoken to you or anyone about him. You think I distrust him—that he is to be distrusted, but I will not believe it. Why only an hour ago I had *proof* of his truth. I—I was frightened I think, when I even seemed to doubt him. Sir Fell," she looks appealingly at her sister, "Sir Fell is enough to upset anyone's judgment," says she, with a forced smile.

"He is enough to make anyone contemplate with cheerfulness the crime of *murder*!" says Sophie gloomily.

* * * * *

Meantime Sir Fell, left alone with Daddledy, proceeds to cross-examine that genial old person.

"Beyond doubt," says Sir Fell, "they *were* here."

"Miss Nora, an'——"

"Tut! No."

"Who thin?"

"Mr. Butler and Mr. Ferris."

"Were they now?"

"You must have seen them; they passed from the small iron gate up this way."

"Faix, 'twas a nice walk too."

"You saw them?"

"Divil a see."

"Look here, Daddledy, you had better be straightforward with *me*."

"It's well to be straightforward always."

"As I say. Now will you keep your eye from this day forth on Mr. Ferris, and report to me when he comes here?"

"Me? is it? An' for what, ava? Faix I'm thinkin' 'tis a detective ye want."

"Take care what you are saying, Daddledy."

"Fegs, I'm thinkin' 'tis *you* who ought to take care. Is it callin' me informer ye are, in me dacent ould age?"

"I am only asking you to do your duty."

"'Tis no me duty, and I'll not do it, and I tell you this, masther, ye'd better take heed to thim childhren."

"What do you mean by that?" demands Sir Fell sharply.

"I mane that you've got money belongin' to 'em, and that things will be required of ye."

"Things—" frowning, "*what* things?"

"Faix, frocks be wan thing," says Daddledy bluntly.

"Miss Nora ye said yerself is in rags; what the divil do ye mane, man, be holdin' back their coppers from 'em an' lettin' 'em bring disgrace upon the ould name? Och! murther! 'Tis long before your father—rest his sowl—would have done the like!"

"Go on with your work!" says Sir Fell indignantly.

"This insolence shall be punished. Who are you, who dare so to dictate to me?"

"Give her a frock! give her a frock!" growls old Daddledy, shaking his head and shouldering his spade and going leisurely down the path. He has been threatened with dismissal so often that he has ceased to think about it.

CHAPTER VI.

"When comes the day, all hearts to weigh
If staunch they be or vile."

TO-DAY is lovely. There was a threatening of rain last night, but all has come to nothing. It is now four o'clock, and still the sky is cloudless, the sun as hot as ever. It tires one's eyes even to look at it. Up here at Castle Saggart it is so hot that they have had to throw thin linen sheets over the conservatories.

"Yet if we put it in the papers they wouldn't believe us," says Mr. Butler, raising himself lazily on his elbow, as much to emphasize his words as to brush away the midges that are feasting heavily upon him.

"They would, if we didn't chance to live in Ireland," says Eusebius Brush, quite as lazily. "But Ireland, according to all acknowledged reports, is one broad swamp. Still,"

drawing a sigh through his cigarette and sending the smoke heavenward through the branches of the tree above his head, "we're happy!"

And truly, whether in Ireland or in Arcadia, it would be impossible to be anything *but* happy to-day, unless one's heart lies low. So clear is the air, so sweet the leafy boughs. From over there—beyond the shrubberies—comes the scent of the clover, and at the other side from a distant meadow one gets the nods of the tall white daisies bowing, and bowing ever in their golden courtesy.

There is, too, the tremulous, sorrowful music of the streams, running idly, vaguely somewhere—(who cares to know where—who cares to limit them?), and above a bird is singing madly in the clear soft sky.

"Only fools are happy," says his mother tartly.

Mrs. Brush—a sister of Sir Fell's, and the owner of a big, square, hideously ugly house, situated about two miles to the north side of Saggartmore village—is a tall, lanky woman. She is a most distinct but unflattering likeness of Sir Fell, and having known Nora and Sophie from the time they were five and six respectively, has always been called by them Aunt Maria, even to the present day. Anyone so gaunt as Mrs. Brush has seldom been seen. She is the thinnest person alive. However, not wishing to be assailed on this point, let us say that she is beyond all doubt the *second* thinnest woman on record.

"Then I'm a happy fool," says Eusebius tranquilly.

If his mother is thin, Eusebius is fat. Dangerously fat. That hideous word stout could not express him. He is six feet four, if an inch, and large in proportion. He is indeed a giant. A greater contrast than he and his mother present, in all ways, could hardly be produced. *She*, a very bare-bones, *he* so excellently covered. She, sour as an apple that never came to perfection, he, lazy, easy-going, and framed for mirth. Lying here now, beneath this wide branching tree, he looks almost colossal, as he reclines full length, watching the tennis players beyond. Lady Saggartmore is at home to-day, and is entertaining the best portion of the county round.

"The fool is never happy!" says his mother in the supulchral tone that always reduces Nora to powder. "However much he may flatter himself about it. Better be dead than a fool!" She stares into space as though seeing

something over there in the ivied wall close to the conservatory, hidden from the sight of ordinary mortals.

"You favour my case," says Eusebius sleepily. "I must be a fool indeed, for I'd far rather be a fool than dead."

"Eusebius! Don't blaspheme!" says his mother, whereupon Eusebius gives way to mirth.

And now there is a little stir behind them—some one is coming this way—some one who is talking and laughing all along the route. It is Lady Saggartmore, a tall, large, handsome woman of about twenty-nine or so, with a fair soft face, and the kindest nature in Christendom.

"Oh! here you are, Eusebius!" says she. "I have been looking for you everywhere. I know you detest tennis, but I want you to come and make up a set for me. Saggartmore has been carried off by two policemen."

"Good heavens! I *am* sorry," says Eusebius, getting as quickly as he can to his feet—which would be a slow process for any other man. "What is it? *Not* petty larceny I hope?"

"*Pouf!*" says Lady Saggartmore. "Nothing half so amusing as that. You needn't hope for it. It appears one of our tenants has got into trouble over something or other, and Saggartmore has gone down to the police court to see if he can't get him off."

"Who was it? Dempsey?"

"Oh, of course," shrugging her handsome shoulders. "It is always Dempsey, but Saggartmore *will* believe in him, and," smiling her broad beautiful smile that has bought for her the love of all the peasants round, "I don't know but he is right. However, in the meantime, I want our friends to enjoy themselves, and I see one of the courts empty. Will you——"

"Boss this show? Certainly!" says Eusebius. "And to begin?"

"Well; get Nora to play with Mr. Carnegie," says Lady Saggartmore, who, besides being a kind woman, is a born match-maker.

"Is that well?" asks Eusebius. "Have you considered the feelings of——"

"Yes yes yes," said Lady Saggartmore, interrupting him without so much as one comma. "And I assure you I think he will do very well. He will survive it."

Eusebius looks at her. Like all big men, he has a long, slow, sort of look.

"I think so too," says he. "Yes, I agree with you."

"Mr. Carnegie is over there," says Lady Saggartmore, pointing carefully to the court beyond, where some people are standing watching the players. "*Do* manage it," says she, giving him a last imperative glance, as she turns aside to make herself charming to some fresh-coming guests.

* * * * *

Eusebius having achieved his object—having, that is, compelled a distinctly unwilling Nora to commence a game, with an even more distinctly *willing* partner—returns to his lounge under the big tree. Mrs. Brush has been mercifully taken away by somebody, and her seat is now occupied by a small, slim, fashionable-looking little creature, who seems all shrugs and smiles, and lace. It would be foolish to deny that Mrs. Vancourt is pretty, but her prettiness is of a

She seems too delicate a being to last—to endure the wear and tear of existence. Like Nora (whom, alas! she has chosen to rival), she is tiny as a fairy, and so fragile, that one wonders at the life within her. She is, indeed, *all* life! Her rather pale blue eyes sparkle with it, her laugh rings sweet with it, her pretty fluffy hair is full of it. It is red hair, but beautiful for all that—or perhaps beautiful because of that.

Many minds; many opinions.

"Ah! Mr. Brush . . . we meet!" says she, holding out her hand to Eusebius. She gives him a little beaming smile as she does so, half closing her lids. It is the smile she gives to her male acquaintances, when *first* she knows them; she reserves a better for later on.

"Why, so we do," says Eusebius enthusiastically. He takes her tiny, exquisitely gloved hand in his large one, and holds it gently for a second or so. "What lucky wave has drifted you here?"

"Why, I *know* this is your favourite resort," says she, now showing her beautiful white teeth, and speaking in a tone as innocent as a child's might be, and as (apparently) devoid of any *arrière pensée*, whatsoever.

"You are too good," says Eusebius, with effusion.

"Oh, no!"

"Not *too* good?" questions he, with his genial smile, now somewhat accentuated. Nora is a favourite of his, and he has felt of late that Mrs. Vancourt's influence over Cyril Ferris—an influence that he knows this rich young widow

is strengthening with all her might—is hardly for Nora's good. The contest has seemed unfair to "Eusebius the Slow," as his friends call him. Nora, with only her loveliness of soul and body, is no match for Eldon Vancourt, with her loveliness of body only.

"Oh! I'm good enough!" says she, "for that matter—if not *too* good. The too good people are always put under ground. I feel sure I am the original of Wordsworth's poem—an original *dreamt*, however, by that queer old man :

'A creature not too bright or good,
For human nature's daily food.'

You remember it?" swaying her little body in the direction of Eusebius.

"I have glimmerings," says that giant. "Do you want me to take *you* for my daily food?"

"Ah! I should only make a mouthful," says she, at which they all laugh.

"Fee-Faw-Fum—is that my name?" asks Eusebius, laughing too, in his slow, easy fashion.

"It sounds like it," says Denis Butler, who has been gazing towards the lower walk—for the past half-hour, as if expecting somebody. "You oughtn't to have grown so much, Brush—it militates against you."

"I'm sorry!" says Eusebius. "I wish I had thought about it sooner. I should have condensed myself like the Swiss milk."

"I say—we ought to do something," says Denis, rising to his feet. He is evidently growing restless.

"Rounders?" suggests Mrs. Vancourt, who doesn't play tennis, and who always finds in rounders a chance of showing off her charming feet, clad in their pretty French shoes.

"By all means," says Eusebius. "An excellent idea. And there," nodding his head towards a distant walk, "comes Peter Kinsella."

"Oh! no, not that awful man," says Mrs. Vancourt piteously. "I couldn't—I really couldn't."

"Poor old Peter; I like him," says Butler.

"His father even more," says Eusebius, laughing. Eusebius is always laughing.

"Oh! His *father*!" says Mr. Vancourt. She puts up

her hands and makes a faint grimace. Her brilliant hair seems to stir. "Anyway, shall we have a game of rounders?" says she.

"No, *thanks*. Not with Brush," says Butler, who, after all, has his own reasons for wishing to shake himself free, and who is perhaps less afraid of Eusebius as an adversary at rounders, as of missing somebody. "The last time I played that game with him, I shan't forget in a hurry. He sent the ball about a mile away, into the very middle of a laurel thicket, and I was the one who had to unearth it, and throw it back. It is there still. I alone came back, and the abuse . . . ! No—it isn't worth it!"

His eyes are still wandering idly, longingly, up-and down that distant walk. Presently they lighten.

"Ah! there is Sophie," says he, involuntarily.

Mrs. Vancourt bursts out laughing. Eusebius joins her. But then *his* laugh is so kindly. He brings his hand down on Butler's shoulder in a massive sort of way.

"Why—she's been here for half an hour," says he. "I have only just come back from arranging a game with Nora and Carnegie, against two others."

"I think you *might* have told me," says Butler, casting an indignant glance at him when they have walked away together out of hearing of the others.

"Why? . . . You looked so comfortable that I thought——"

"I thought she was late," says Denis. "So late, that I feared she wasn't coming. I walked a dozen times to the small gateway over there, and then gave up hope. You, knowing how it is with me, might have given me a word."

"Explanations waste time," says Eusebius, good-naturedly. "Run, dear boy, run," giving him a gentle push. "I expect *you* will have to do the explanations now; go and waste *your* time."

"How he gives himself away," says Mrs. Vancourt, leaning back in her seat. She is choking with laughter, and is pressing a delicate little lace handkerchief to her lips.

"Men are fools!" agrees Eusebius delightfully. "I often wonder how you women even so much as look at us. There's Sophie Carew, quite an ordinary sort of girl——"

"Quite—*quite*!"

"And yet this silly fellow of ours, who has just left us, regards her as the last new edition of Venus. And there's her sister, some one thinks *her* a Venus too!—to give another instance. Though," pausing and looking at her, "instances are unnecessary, don't you think?"

"I do. Go on," says she quickly. She leans forward. "Go on," says she.

"Well—her sister, you know—Miss Carew—cousin of mine, you know, in a way——"

"Yes, I know. 'In a *way*.' Are you in love with her too?—that skinny little thing!" She recovers herself almost immediately—yet the late touch of passion shows itself in the constrained smile, the quick breathing. "Yes, of course I know," she says airily. "Cousins are always so interesting. Well—go on!"

"About what?" asks Eusebius, "about Sophie's sister, wasn't it? About Nora. Nora is charming, isn't she?"

"Ah, I *said* you were in love with her," says Mrs. Vancourt. She clasps her arms over her knees, and smiles brightly. She looks as if she would encourage him in this thought of hers.

"Did you? I wish it were true," says Eusebius. "I should really *like* to be in love I think. Variety, they say, is charming. But you would not have me unhappy, would you? And, certainly, Nora is not in love with me."

"No?"

"Nor I with her."

"Then who is?" demands she quickly.

"Did I say anyone was?"

"You suggested the thought. You said there was *some* one who regarded her as a Venus! What a *thought*!" She leans back and laughs, but in a rather suffocated sort of way. "Tell me who it was," says she.

"Well," says he deliberately, "I heard it was Ferris."

"Ferris! Cyril Ferris!" Her little sharp face lights somewhat viciously; she leans forward and taps furiously against the edge of her chair. "*What a lie!*" she says.

Eusebius smiles. He would have liked to laugh, but that delight he feels is forbidden him on this occasion.

"No doubt," says he, equably. "Report is a liar—at the top of his profession."

"How rude of me—how—how unpardonable!" says Mrs. Vancourt, sweetly, who has now recovered herself and

is anxious to cover up her sudden little burst of wrath. "What a *bêtise* ! But you see I know Cyril Ferris very well, we were great friends when . . . before . . . the death of my poor husband, and, I can't bear to hear him . . .," she hesitates—

"Maligned ?" suggests Eusebius, grimly.

"Well—hardly that, you know. But accused of being a—well—a flirt. That's a horrid word, except when applied to a woman, eh ?"

"There are men"—begins Eusebius—"Well, and you don't think he is a—we won't mention the horrid word."

"No. No, indeed. I, who am such a friend of his, I should *know*. But I confess he has a kind little way with women, especially with girls, that often misleads them. You should tell this to—— By-the-bye, you are a friend of hers ?"

"Of whose ?"

"Of Miss Carew's."

"Certainly a friend."

"Then you might hint to her what I have just hinted to you—about poor dear Cyril's ridiculous kindliness of heart and manner, that has so often led to misconceptions. Several times, even during the life of poor Mr. Vancourt, I have got him out of little scrapes—little unimportant scrapes, you will understand. You *will* explain to her ?"

"I am afraid not," says Eusebius, with the pleasantest nod at her. "You see I never take hints, therefore I can never *give* hints. Stupid of me, isn't it ?"

"Yet, if you are her friend, as you," with a soft sneer, "*hinted*, a while since, you ought to help her to see her way about in this complication : she is so charming, that," sweetly, "it seems a pity that she should so—so——"

"Give herself away," suggests Eusebius. "That is a pet phrase of yours, isn't it ? As an admirer of yours I copy it now. Imitation, you know, is the sincerest form of flattery. Many people give themselves away, don't you think ?"

"I don't know, I'm sure," says she coldly. "How dull it is here, isn't it ? Oh ! Mr. Kinsella ! Yes ! Yes ; I *shall* like to go and look at the swans feeding."

CHAPTER VII.

"When, like the rising day,
 Eileen Aroon !
 Love sends his early ray,
 Eileen Aroon !
 What makes his dawning glow,
 Changeless through joy or woe ?
 Only the constant know——
 Eileen Aroon !

THE day now is at its height. The tennis-players are flagging. Above them the blazing sun is glaring, staring, subduing them with his heat. Men in flannels, girls in pretty bodices and delightful skirts, pale blue and dark, and great broad-brimmed hats, trimmed delicately with chiffon and coloured flowers, are playing desperately, if languidly, as if in despite of the deadly rays that old Sol is pouring down upon them.

Nora Carew, who has just finished her game, and won it—more through her partner's play than hers, however—is now standing on one of the gravelled walks, this skilful partner beside her.

St. John Carnegie is a tall man of about four or five and thirty. There is so little to describe about him, that it seems hardly worth while to go into it, yet a few words must be said. His irregular features are in a measure compensated for by his tall and handsome figure, and his manner is beyond reproach. Very young girls, without exception, call him ugly. Some women have, however, considered him handsome. Beauty, as we all know, is in the eye of the beholder ; and, at all events, no matter how it goes with Carnegie, one thing stands constant, nobody ever thought he looked anything but a gentleman.

His earnest face is full of life now, as he speaks to Nora Carew, but that wilful child's eyes, being anywhere but on his, fail to see the depth of his regard. And now a little obstruction occurs. Some people come down the walk. There is a fresh shuffling of the cards, and Nora finds herself separated from Carnegie, and face to face with Ferris.

"Come for a walk with me," says he, in a rather dictatorial tone—a tone, however, that is sweet to the girl, being as it is, proprietary. He has come up to her in a masterful way, with a slight frown on his handsome brow, and a glance that covers her with reproach. He had seen her play out that game of tennis with Carnegie; he had heard of late half-laughing innuendoes of the latter's constant attentions to Nora, and to-day has brought the truth of those idle reports home to him. Carnegie's open, honest admiration for the charming, slight, pretty creature has whetted Ferris' own desire for her, and there is now distinct jealousy in his whole air as he addresses her.

Ferris had been designed for the army from early age. His father had been a Colonel in a distinguished corps, and the boy was always brought up to believe he should follow in his father's steps. But Colonel Ferris had died (when his son was only fourteen), so encumbered with debts of all kinds, that his widow had to make a struggle for even bare existence. There had been a bitter giving up of most things, and of those the bitterest was the thought that the boy could never now enter the army.

It was, perhaps, the last straw, when a friend came forward and offered to place him in a house of business. It was a house so distinguished that many young men of even better family than Ferris would have accepted the offer with gratitude, but Mrs. Ferris who was a Baronet's daughter, and as near an approach to an idiot as society will admit in its rooms, refused the offer. She died shortly afterwards, leaving Ferris, with a bare four hundred a year, no profession, the most expensive taste, and a ravenous appetite for all the extravagances that the world affords.

Lady Saggartmore (who is a cousin of his), had taken him up then, and done what she could for him. She had got him several posts, but (it was *never* his own fault, somehow) he had always been compelled to throw them up. He spends a good deal of his time now at Saggartmore, in spite of that, and the fact that Lady Saggartmore (a fact concealed, however) regards him with a certain contempt. Still, a handsome young cousin, with a distinguished appearance, a reputation for being one of the best theatrical amateurs extant—a good shot—and a straight man to hounds (Saggartmore likes a man who rides well, and is always willing to mount him)—such a young man as this

always counts in country houses, and is by no means to be despised, even if his income is a thing of naught.

Lady Saggartmore, therefore, if indifferent to him as an individual, is always willing to have him in her house, when at home—and this year, owing to an illness of one of her two adored little sons, she has missed her season in town. The little fellow, though now out of danger, is still too weak to permit of his moving; the crossing from Kingstown to Holyhead might prove too much for him, says the local doctor, a tall, fair man, with a kind eye, and a manner that gives hope to the anxious watcher in the sick room, so that Lady Saggartmore has abandoned her hope of town life for this year, much to the delight of her husband, who is always a little out of it, as it were, when removed from his “fresh fields and pastures new.”

The little man being on the fair road to perfect health again, though scarcely fit to travel, Lady Saggartmore has elected to drag amusement out of the people round her. She has indeed made open house, of late, asking her neighbours to come to her as often as possible for tennis, rounders—and so on. Just now there is a little talk of theatricals and a dance afterwards.

There is a kinship between the Saggartmores and the Carews, the late Lady Anketell having been a cousin of Lady Saggartmore's, so that Cyril, who is kin to both, claims cousinship with the Carew girls also.

It is now growing towards the end of June, but it was in March last that Ferris (then too staying at the Castle) had met Nora Carew, and had fallen in love with her. It was, perhaps, the one honest love of his life; and the girl had responded to it. Many words had been said on both sides, and Ferris had gone back to England with a somewhat uneasy conscience. Many words had been said, and once he had kissed her—but did he mean anything? He grew impatient when he asked himself that question—the girl's small, lovely, flower-like face rose always before him, full of its trust and sweetness, and yet! there was no money anywhere! Was he to sacrifice himself, or give her up? He hardly knew what he meant.

And now he has come back again, and Nora is, if possible, even a little lovelier. And—and yet to live, to endure life without money! How is that to be done? And, besides, there is someone else now *with* money,

and—— But to give up Nora, to resign her! The small, poor soul that was given to him at his birth is torn in two.

As for Nora! That she believes herself engaged to him is beyond all doubt. The poor child's belief in *that*, is as strong as her faith in Heaven—the good, kind Heaven that is going to grant her all her desires. That first, only, sweet, perfect kiss had decided that. There was indeed but one sad drop in her cup of joy; when he left her, last March, he would not let her tell Sophie of her happiness: he had forbidden her, indeed, to speak of it to anyone; and it would have been so good to talk it all over with Sophie—just the mere *fact* of the engagement; of course, there were loving words said, and tender glances given, and that one beloved kiss, that must for ever remain sacred to her own heart alone.

There was no doubt in her young mind. That they, she and he, should ultimately get married, when all the troublesome webs of life were swept out of their paths, and live happy ever after, was sure to her. Whilst he, though as much in love with her as his shallow nature would permit, was permitting himself doubts as to their future lives, even whilst caressing the small, sweet head, and the dainty hands.

It had never occurred to him to stand up and defy Fate, to stretch out strong arms and grasp life, and wring from it hope and purpose and certainty—all he could do was to rail at it, and call himself injured, because the Heavens had not rained down upon him quails and manna, and flung into his idle lap a fortune ready made, that would have enabled him to wed this one, small, lovely creature, who of all Earth's daughters seems most fair to him.

That she might know suffering because of him, did not come home to him then, or now, or ever; all he felt or knew was, that *he* might suffer.

CHAPTER VIII.

"She is too kind and fond,
 Ever to grieve me;
 She has too pure a heart,
 E'er to deceive me.
 Were I Tyrconnell's chief,
 Or Desmond's earl,
 Life would be dark, wanting
Maire, my girl!"

"COME!" says he again.

Nora flushes delicately.

"I don't know if I can," says she; her tone is nervous, and she glances with apprehension round her. "Sir Fell—you know, he makes me unhappy always—and, to-day, he has forbidden me to speak to you."

"To *me*!"

"Oh! *don't* be angry," says she miserably. "You know, it is only because——"

"I have no money," supplies he, as she hesitates. "I am not a desirable suitor! I can quite see that myself. There"—regarding her frowningly—"is *another* suitor more desirable, perhaps——"

"There is no other suitor so far as *I* am concerned," says she. "It is only that he has——Well—I think"—piteously—"he has taken a dislike to you."

"It comes to the same thing," says he. "One can measure the dislike. A few months ago Sir Fell was civil enough to me, but now—— There is another in the field——"

"I don't understand you," says she slowly. She has grown a little pale, but very calm besides. The slight touch of emotion that had characterised her just now has disappeared. She has grown very quiet. Her manner indeed is always so reserved, as to give her acquaintances the impression of coldness. "What should Sir Fell know of you and me? It is only that he——" She pauses, and puts out her hand involuntarily as if seeking aid

where indeed no aid is—"wants me to marry Mr. Carnegie."

"And yet you say," says he in a choking tone, "that there is nothing between you and——"

"There *is* nothing. For my own part," hurriedly, "I don't believe Mr. Carnegie wishes to marry me, but Sir Fell imagines otherwise."

"Oh! if it comes to that," says Ferris roughly, "the sooner I bid you a final farewell the better."

"Why?" asks Nora steadily, though her lips have grown a little pale. "I have told you that Mr. Carnegie thinks as little of me, as I do of him, but——"

"But," bitterly, "your stepfather thinks otherwise, is that it?"

"No. Hardly that. Cyril," nervously, "do you know that Sophie has a theory—I—I *hope* it isn't true, but she says that Sir Fell knows we cannot marry without his permission until we are both twenty-five, and that therefore he will welcome any chance of refusing his permission until then."

"There would be no chance for him to refuse permission for your marriage with Carnegie."

"No. But—I should refuse then—and perhaps he knows that. At least, Sophie thinks——"

"Sophie thinks what?"

"That Sir Fell will keep the interest of our money as long as he can."

"Sophie is an oracle," says Ferris; he laughs curiously, as if failing to enjoy his own mirth. "Well—it will come to that, I suppose."

"What will come?"

"Our final separation," gloomily; "you would not be sorry for that."

"That is a speech from you," says the girl, "that I do not—that I *will* not understand." She glances at him, a little, soft, quick glance, that lets him see the sad mist that is softening her already too soft eyes. "You *must* know, Cyril, what I mean."

"What you mean," moodily, "*perhaps*!" There is insult almost in the doubt. "But with regard to Sir Fell, where does the doubt come in? Sophie has explained him, and I fail to see why you should so entirely give in to him. You say you fear to go for a walk with me! He

is not your father—and even if he *were*, he could not turn you out of doors, I presume, or starve you to death, in the good old style—or beat you—or——”

“Oh no!” says Nora sighing; perhaps she would have preferred the good old style; then one’s lover took one out of an upper window, and carried one away willingly on his horse, pillion-wise. “Oh, no,” says she. “But—he could make a scene!”

It is such a terrible climb down from the window and the pillion. In the old, dark days, nobody cared anything about a scene. In fact, the more scene there was, the better, but now! . . .

“What scene?”

“Well. He threatened me with one this morning. He said if he saw you playing the——That is,” stopping dead short and colouring violently. “If he saw you making yourself even agreeable to me, he would take me home, before everybody.”

“He is as nice a man as I know,” says Ferris, with an unmirthful laugh. “He has an idea then that I—that you——”

“That I love you? Yes,” says Nora, softly. “I am afraid he guesses something, though I have never said anything. Not even to Sophie——”

“Something *must* have been said.”

“Not by me, at all events,” a little haughtily.

“I am not thinking that,” quickly. He pauses, looking at her, and as if angered at finding himself placed in the wrong even in so small a way, he turns upon her instantly.

“I am thinking only,” says he, in an aggrieved fashion, “that rather than endure a little discomfort, you would give up my society for the rest of the afternoon.”

Nora’s eyes grow dark—there is pain in them.

“It was of you I thought,” says she. “Of you. *You* would not like a scene.”

“That is one way of putting it,” says he moodily, who in truth would not have given himself one second’s discomfort to oblige anybody. That he is in love with her to the final extent that his nature will allow, is beyond question—but that does not carry him far; not at all events from that centre of the universe to *him*—namely Cyril Ferris!

She has touched him certainly, as no woman in all his life has ever touched him before, or ever does afterwards,

but then to marry on nothing but love, or on next to nothing—on a beggarly four hundred a year, that barely suffices to keep his own body and soul together, and buy his gloves and cigars, and an opera-box or two in the season! No. It is not good enough. It would hardly support him and another, and certainly not such a standing item as a wife.

That Nora will have five thousand pounds on her twenty-fifth birthday has become known to him of late, but what is five thousand pounds? a mere drop in the ocean—and there are other chances—there is certainly one immediate other chance, that would put him on his legs at once—and for life.

Yet whatever heart he has, clings to the girl; in her he finds his chiefest, purest joy. Yet always with a secret knowledge that the joy is but for the moment. It will end, surely, if not swiftly, and, with a selfishness the most execrable, he abandons himself to it, with no thought of the anguish he is preparing for the young sweetheart that loves him.

He lifts his head and looks round him.

"Sir Fell is not here now," says he, "come up to the laurel walk with me."

CHAPTER IX.

"It is not that thy smile is sweet
And soft thy voice of song—
It is not that thou fliest to meet
My comings lone and long!
But that doth rest beneath thy breast
A heart of purest core
Whose pulse is known to me alone
Brighidín dan mo stor."

"If you think it safe," says Nora, hesitating.

"Of course if you don't *want* to come, that makes all the difference. Don't bore yourself, to please *me*. If," his blue eyes flashing, "you would prefer to stay here and continue your flirtation with Carnegie, say so."

"I was not flirting with Mr. Carnegie," coldly. "I," regarding him with a certain meaning, and with a little gentle emphasis, "never flirt."

"Don't you? For all that, Carnegie is better worth cultivating than I am. He has money. I am a pauper."

"It is nothing to me," says Nora proudly, though secretly wincing at this suspicion, and the paltriness of her idol—"whether Mr. Carnegie is rich or otherwise. It is nothing to me also—" with a droop of her head, and a sad but lovely glance at him, "that you are as you say, a pauper."

Her meaning is so plain, the love-light in her eyes so clear, that even *he* gives way before it.

"What eyes you have, Nora," says he with a touch of passion, "I *hate* to think they can look at anyone but me."

"Would you have me blind, then?" asks she laughing—delighted at this change in his tone, that breathes of love once more."

"To all but me—yes!"

"Why that is selfish," says she gaily.

"Is it?" He looks at her. "Do you know," says he, "that I have been called selfish now and then. Why, I wonder? Do I—" regarding her earnestly—"Do I appear really selfish—to you?"

"No—no, what an idea! How absurd," says she quickly, "you know I was only in fun when I said that. Why——" She stops suddenly, seeing he is not listening to her, but is gazing over her shoulder at something or someone. His face has altered its expression.

"What is it?" asks she hurriedly. "Not Sir Fell?" She turns, to see Sir Fell turning the corner of the conservatory, with a little fragile, laughing companion. It is Mrs. Vancourt.

"Yes. Sir Fell," says Ferris. "Come. Come quickly. As you say, it is always well to avoid a scene.

It is now he who seems most desirous to get away—to avoid annoyance of any kind.

Nora goes with him, skirting one of the courts, and past the tall, pretty, white, pigeon cot, and so to the laurel grove, where many walks give many opportunities for persecuted lovers.

They both breathe more freely as they reach one of these paths, and feel themselves safe from observation. All the others are engrossed in the games going on below, and these thick kindly laurel hedges effectually conceal them from view:

"How calm it is here," says Nora, "and how pretty with that distant glimpse of the lake. I really think——"

"It is abominable," breaks out Ferris angrily. Astonished, frightened, by the unexpected outbreak, she looks at him, to find him frowning—furious. "To have to fly like this," he goes on vehemently. "To have one's absence noted, commented upon. To be brought to book as it were? *why* cannot I see you, and talk to you, as——"

"Do not be so unhappy about me," says she, laying her hand upon his arm, and loving him the more for this outburst of his, that seems to point so sweetly to his care for her. "He will not miss me. He will not notice my absence."

"Oh! *Sir Fell!*" says he impatiently—and then, suddenly recollecting, he lays his hand on hers and presses it, and laughs a little demonstratively.

"And even if he does," says he, "we must only make the best of it, eh? Eh? What a little hand yours is, Nora! Like a child's—a baby's."

Nora smiles. Then suddenly, as if compelled to say it——

"Not so small as Mrs. Vancourt's," says she.

"Oh hers! Is hers small? Never mind her, let us come back to ourselves. It does seem hard, doesn't it, that I can't meet you as another might—as Carnegie can for example—without dreading an explosion at any moment? Can I not see you in *some* way, Nora? This evening say—Dinner is over here at about nine. It is quite light then, and I could slip away, and——?"

"Yes. Perhaps," says Nora thoughtfully. "Sir Fell goes to the library after dinner, and then—Do you know that little wood at the end of the lawn, where the bridge is? Sophie and I go down there almost every evening. Will you meet us there?"

"Us?" impatiently.

"Sophie likes to go for a walk with me in the evening," casting a little deprecatory glance at him. "And Sophie is always so good to me. And sometimes, you see, Denis comes there to see her. You know," with a meaning little laugh, that breaks most oddly through her evident dejection, "she is nearly as unhappy as we are. Because Sir Fell disapproves of Denis, too."

"I expect he will disapprove of anyone for a few years to come," with a sneer. "But with regard to meeting you—is there *always* to be Sophie?"

"I shouldn't like to *do* anything that Sophie might not know about," says Nora, speaking with decision, whilst colouring vividly. It seems dreadful to her to go against him in anything, but to deceive Sophie in act—no—she has gone far enough; she will go no farther.

"What do you mean by that?" says he, noting the emphasis on the "*do*," and the sudden colouring.

"Cyril, you *must* know!" gently, but with a sort of repulsion. She releases herself from his encircling arm, and looks straight at him. "How often have I told you that the keeping of our engagement from her is a pain to me? An *actual* pain," says the poor child, raising her hand to her throat. "But to *do* anything, to *go* anywhere. No—*no*," says she.

"Well, then, I suppose there is nothing for it, but Sophie always," says he, with a shrug, "though I confess I could do without her. Shall I tell you something, Nora, that you know already? Sophie detests me."

"Detests? No. Oh, certainly not," cries Nora, as if shocked. "Why should you think that? Oh, no, it is not that."

"If not that—then what is it?" demands he, regarding her keenly. "Come now, Nora, when she speaks of me—when she deigns to speak of me at all—what does she say?"

"Say? Why——" she stops short in a little, soft, confused way, and her colour mounts even higher.

"That last flush is enough," says he, laughing lightly, if a little bitterly. "Those darling lips of yours were never made for lying. One can see that. They were only made for——"

He draws her to him. She shakes herself free, but he still holds her, and questions her.

"For kissing me—me only, Nora. *Say* that!"

"You know it," whispers she back, sweetly; but there are tears in her eyes.

"Well—and Sophie?" questioning her still, and still laughing, and holding her little hands against his heart, "she distrusts me?"

"Why should she?"

"Heaven alone knows! That *you* don't, is all the world to me. You don't, sweetheart?"

"Cyril," says she quietly. "Have I ever asked you, if you distrust me?"

"No." His gaiety suddenly deserts him ; still holding her hands, he presses them even *more* vehemently against his breast, but his eyes fall before hers. "Do not talk of mistrust," says he.

"Why, it was you who talked of it."

"Was it? Well, it was idle talk between you and me. Let us return to Sophie ; what is it she says of me to you? That I am a gay deceiver, eh? Come now, confess—you little saint," and he gives her a loving shake.

"She—she certainly sometimes does hint dreadful things about you," admits Nora, reluctantly. "But it is only because you will not let me tell her of our engagement, and because, therefore, she does not understand you. Not a *bit*, she doesn't! But," with a charming smile, that sweetens her eyes and lips, "*I do! I know you! I know there is no one in the world so true, so good as you are!*"

A sharp, swift change comes over Ferris' face. For one second he looks as if some gentle thing had stabbed him to death.

"Nora!" says he. His tone is low, and shocked, as if he has grown suddenly horrified. But at what? Has the girl's trust and perfect faith in him been a revelation? Has he now for the first time caught sight of his own soul, in its terrible nakedness?

The shock, however, lasts but a moment. He recovers out of it with astonishing rapidity. He is indeed, almost immediately, his own self-satisfied, self-admiring, selfish self, again.

"Why there," says he, and still his tone is remorseful, though now unconsciously so, "perhaps Sophie understands me well enough. I do not pose as an 'unco guid.' I pose only as—your lover! Your lover to the death! Heavens! If I had money, Nora"—he takes her hand again, and wrings it—"I would let Sophie and all the world see how I regard you!"

"Cyril!" says the girl sharply. Somehow this new passion of his repulses her. "Don't talk like that. What is poverty?—nothing! Don't be unhappy because you are poor. Would I love you more, if you were rich? *Could I? Oh no!*"

"When I see an angel of goodness, is it not natural that I should regret my inability to make that angel my own?" says he. "Do you think I do not dwell upon

my poverty night and day? A poor devil of a beggar like me, what right have I to raise my eyes to you?"

"Money is not everything," says she. "Oh! Cyril, believe that."

"It *is* everything," returns he gloomily.

"Ah! You did not say that the other day in the orchard," cries she involuntarily.

She stops dead short. She grows crimson. Even her loving eyes grow full of tears, born of confusion.

"Oh!" says she.

CHAPTER X.

"Her breath was as the honey wrought by the wandering bee;
Her lips as two red berries, plucked from the rowan-tree,
And rose-red as young cherries her round cheek, fresh and free."

THAT she has betrayed herself is plain to Nora. Her colour comes and goes—her mind travels backwards—and once again she finds herself in the middle of the old apple-tree, listening to the voices of the two young men beneath. To one voice, specially, the voice that always thrilled her. Had she not been so overcome by her sudden recollection, she might have noticed the alteration in the face before her. But her eyes are on the ground, and Cyril's quick change of colour and expression remain unknown to her. He gets over his confusion too, far easier than she does, and when at last the girl summons sufficient courage to look up, she finds him, if a little pale, perfectly serene.

"In the orchard," says he, as if hardly understanding. "What orchard?"

"Don't mind! Don't ask me."

"Yes, but I think I must," says he, smiling—if in a rather strained way—still with remarkable success. "An orchard? Whose orchard? *Your* orchard?"

"Oh, Cyril! You won't forgive me, but really I couldn't help it. I couldn't *indeed*." Again her pretty eyes fill with tears. "You know, yesterday, when you and Denis came into the orchard—you remember?"

"I am not likely to forget. We got over the wall to avoid Sir Fell and his agreeable speeches, and wandered aimlessly about, seeking for you. We gave you up at last, and yet you seem to have—Why," quickly, easily, and with a gently curious air, that makes one understand at

once how he has earned his reputation as a distinguished amateur, "where were you?"

"Up in an old apple-tree!" says Nora, laughing, but rather shame-facedly. "Sophie and I together. And I had torn my frock; and when we saw you, I told Sophie I should never forgive her if she said a word. I,"—blushing softly—"was afraid you would think me *so* untidy, and besides," looking down, "it was a very old gown, and I—look horrid in it."

It is the tenderest, the fondest confession.

"I don't believe that," says Ferris, caressing her hand. "'The dress *you* wear, my Nora Creina,' must become you. Fancy *you*, ever looking horrid. It is high treason to say so. Well, and——?"

"Well—we—I—we put our fingers in our ears for a long time, and shut our eyes tight; but it is hard to keep up a position like that; and after awhile we——I wish," wistfully—"I had risked that old gown now, and called out to you—but, somehow, I *couldn't* then, and in the end I heard all——"

"The terrible things I said about you?"—smiling, and putting back a little straying curl behind her ear.

"No!" shaking her head—"All the *lovely* things you said, about money being worthless beside love! Ah! you cannot persuade me now that you have a mercenary soul. All your talk about money as a chief good, goes for nothing! I have heard your real sentiments—when you little thought I was listening."

"Perhaps," always smiling and caressing her hand—"I *knew* you were listening!"

"Pouf!"—gaily—"That won't do. As if you could be guilty of such an act as that! No, I heard you, and I am glad of it."

"You said you were sorry just now!" He drops her hand gently but quickly.

"Well—I'm not. I like to be in a position to compel you to do yourself justice. You were true to yourself then."

"Was I? Perhaps I was posing for Butler's benefit."

"Oh! come now, Cyril! As if you could persuade me to regard you in such a light. No, no no! You meant every word you said. Do you know?"—with a merry sweetness—"you want me—you want someone who really

understands how good you are—*au fond*—to *compel* you to see the innate goodness of your own heart. You honestly agree with me in thinking money quite a secondary thing after all—and——”

He puts her back from him.

“What do you know about it?” says he, roughly. “What do you know about anything—a child like you! I tell you, you know nothing—nothing!”

“I know you,” says she with soft persistence and great faith, though she is evidently both repelled and offended by his manner.

“That least of all,” says he—he pauses, and stares at her as if wondering. It seems beyond wonder to him almost. Why almost *anyone* would have known! On the instant his mind runs to Eldon Vancourt. She, at all events, knows. She appraises him at his right value, whilst showing herself willing to throw her life into the current of his. Eldon! and Nora! Morning, and pure Dawn! He suddenly bursts out laughing.

“Yes!” says Nora, calmly; almost unconsciously she repulses his desire to take her hand.

“Why—it was only a sudden thought,” says he, still laughing a little wildly. A curious fancy, that if Death now came to him he would welcome it, makes a discordant crash amongst the strings of his mind.

“What thought?” She still stands well away from him, her large clear eyes scanning his face. There is a time before him, when he hates to remember the stern questionings of those young, sweet eyes.

“A mad one,” says he. “Let us forget it. The real thing is, that I fear to drag you into poverty.”

“Was that all?”

“Oh, yes—all! Is it not enough?”

“No,” says she suddenly. “I wish—I *wish*, Cyril, I could see into your very heart. In there—I should learn everything. Sometimes you see you frighten me. But I—I can never frighten you. I give my heart to you!”—she pauses—and a touch of keen despair—that borders upon tragedy—covers her young face. “Read it!”

“I have read it,” says he. All laughter has died from him now. His face looks set and grey. He makes a sharp movement of the hand, as if he would put something from

him. "You should read me as clearly. I tell you all I dread is poverty for you."

"For me, *with* you? It would have no dread for me," says she.

"So you think now."

"I shall think so always. To be with you——" begins she.

"Ah! with me! You would soon tire of me when poverty crept in at the window."

"Cyril!" She pauses. . . . "After all, you don't know *much*," says she presently. "Now—don't be angry with me, but—I must say it. I know, as a *fact*, that you don't care for money in itself, but I do think you lay too great a stress upon what it can do for one."

This nice distinction she makes in all good-faith.

"It is only for your sake," says he, almost believing in himself, as he says it—"One can't but think of the value of it, when the happiness of one's best possession is threatened by the want of it. You see, there it is! The whole question in a nut-shell. Money, as a mere bald metal, is nothing; but money, as a lever that moves the world, is everything."

"Oh, no," says she, impetuously. "It is Love that moves the world. That is the greatest—the strongest lever of all. You must allow that, Cyril—you—— *What is it?*"

"Hush!" says he. He puts up his hand; and both listen intently.

Steps in the gravel walk at their right can now be distinctly heard.

"It is Sir Fell," says she, quickly, but in a low tone; she makes one little frightened step to the right.

"Wait a moment," says Ferris, holding her. He has noticed not only Sir Fell's footsteps, but those of his companion. Small, light steps. He has even heard the faint sound of the little tinkling laugh, so well known to him. If she were to find him here, now, with Nora, the game (hardly yet begun) would be all at once at an end.

"What shall I do?" says Nora.

"He is coming this way," says Cyril. "Go up that path, you, and I'll go this way."

"You'll meet him that way."

"Better that I should meet him than you," says Ferris,

with a truly noble air—he has told himself, in the few seconds that have gone by, that he would be more likely to explain the matter satisfactorily to Eldon Vancourt, than Nora would. Nora would be so sure to tell the truth—or, at all events, let the truth be known. “Now, darling, give in to me in this. Do you think I could let you be scolded by Sir Fell, and all for *my* fault?”

“I might have known you would think of that,” says she, tenderly. “But why can’t you come with me?”

“Because they must have heard us talking, and—I shall know how to explain. There, go—go—go,” says he hurriedly.

“Yes. But — but — Mrs. Vancourt is with Sir Fell, Cyril. I—I *do* so hate her. Promise me you will not talk to her.”

“No—of course not. Why should I?”

“Well—but just—just say *you* hate her too.”

“I do. I detest her. There!” as the steps grow nearer. “For Heaven’s sake, go! And—remember, this evening.”

“Yes—yes. But if she talks to you——?”

“I’ll cut her short. I’ll insult her. Nora! *Do* you want a scene——?”

“No,” says Nora—“only——”

Ferris draws a quick breath. Already Sir Fell and Mrs. Vancourt are so dangerously near as to make his voice known to them at any moment. Despair rouses him to genius. “Can’t you trust me?” says he—the keenest reproach in his whole tone and air.

In a second she is gone. With a last glance at him, full of glad relief, she has slipped round the corner, and is now many yards away!

With a sigh of relief, Ferris sinks upon a rustic seat, and let his head fall upon his hand. As a sadly meditative man, he is perfect! He awaits the advent of Sir Fell and Mrs. Vancourt with composure, having now provided against any immediate unpleasantness. A disturbance of any sort would annoy him intensely and upset most of his calculations. To have Sir Fell make himself disagreeable to him, because of his supposed (happily only supposed) love affair with his step-daughter would not suit his book at all—at present, at all events. And Eldon! Eldon, who is always so confoundedly jealous! She would see and hear

everything, and that wealthy and handsome little widow, who is—*well*—rather a friend of his, would undoubtedly bear malice! Wealthy and handsome widows, as a rule, do not like their friends to admire anyone but themselves.

Of course, he might have followed Nora into that upper walk, but that would have necessitated their appearing together on the tennis court below, a walk, and a court, perfectly visible to both Sir Fell and Mrs. Vancourt from where they now are.

CHAPTER XI.

“Thy face is paler than the moon; my heart is paler still—
My heart? I had no heart—’twas yours—’twas *yours* to keep or kill.”

SIR FELL and Mrs. Vancourt turn the corner at a speed that might be called racing—Mrs. Vancourt winning by a head. There is something in the tilting of her determined little chin, the sparkling brightness of her clever eyes, something, indeed, in the very sweetness of her smile, that warns Ferris she is on the war-path. Her first glance at him is followed by a sharp, inquisitorial glance to right and left of him, and even into the dense thicket of low-cut laurels that stands before him.

“Alone?” says she briskly.

“Unfortunately,” says Ferris, with a calm that enrages her. “If you have come here for society,” rising with a pleasant smile, and a little vague movement of the arms, looks as if it would have been a comfortable stretch if she were not present. “I’m afraid you will be disappointed. They are all down on the tennis grounds, I think.”

“All?” Her manner is still remarkably airy, if violently doubtful.

“We certainly thought we heard voices,” says Sir Fell, in his own harsh tones.

“Did you? No wonder,” says Ferris, “everyone seems to be all over the place to-day. I came here hoping for quiet, and a cigarette—but——”

“Where’s the cigarette?” asks Mrs. Vancourt. She stands smiling down upon him. There is something mocking in the smile now.

Such a smile! Truly he *had* forgotten the cigarette. To make the thing perfect, he should have had that cigarette between his fingers. At this moment he hates her.

"I am just going to light it," says he, leisurely, slipping his hand into his pocket.

"Oh, no! you are not. You are coming down to the grounds with Sir Fell and me," says Mrs. Vancourt, lightly, prettily, but with an underlying decisiveness that sounds dangerous. She lays her hand upon his arm—a hand as devoid of weight as a snow-flake, but that nevertheless feels as heavy as a stone to Ferris. "I can't bear to picture you here all alone with no one to talk to, no one to console you, a mere forsaken wreck!"

There is something diabolic in the easy, light laughter that follows this speech.

"It cuts me to the heart to think of you having been sitting here all by yourself for this last dull half hour."

"I have not been so altogether alone as you imagine," says Ferris.

"No," she laughs again, this time even more maliciously.

"No. I have had my thoughts."

"Pleasant ones apparently! Do look at him, Sir Fell. What a picture of despair! or rather of the naughty boy who cried for the moon!" She pauses. "Where is your moon?" says she.

"In the heavens!" says he. His face is white.

"Beyond your reach?"

"That is for you to say," his eyes fixed steadily on hers.

"For me!" It is her turn to look at him.

"For you!"

"What a *liar* you are!" says she, in a low tone as fierce as it is low. It is unheard by Sir Fell, who has been running over in his own mind the truth of the idea she has been inculcating him with, during the walk she has compelled him to take up here. He would much rather have remained below, carrying out his own designs; but she had hinted to him that Nora was sitting amongst the laurels with Ferris, and that at once had seemed to him the first thing to combat. Nora's marriage should be prevented at all risks.

Her marriage, or the marriage of Sophie, would mean the loss of so much a year to him. He had felt deep joy when St. John Carnegie had shown a preference for Nora, knowing that the girl, with her heart full of Ferris, would certainly refuse him. If he, Sir Fell, hindered her marriage, with *all* suitors, people might talk—but if he encouraged

Carnegie, who was eligible (and yet to whom he knew she would certainly have nothing to say), and turned his back on Ferris, whom all the world knew to be a ne'er-do-weel, then who could talk? He hugged himself over this clever solving of a rather difficult problem.

"It is in your power to say what you like to me," says Ferris slowly.

"Is it? I think so myself. Sir Fell," turning to him, and speaking as lightly, as unconcernedly, as if only a second ago her face had not looked like a fiend, "we were wrong, you see! There is nobody here of any real importance, except Mr. Ferris."

"I thought perhaps—" begins Sir Fell, frowning at Ferris.

"Oh, no, you mustn't think," says she, prettily. "Thinking brings trouble. Come! Let us all go back to the grounds. Tea is in the conservatory, I think, and," with a delightful little affectation of misery, "I do so *want* my tea!"

The three go down the path together past the lake and towards the large conservatory, where tea is usually served as long as the warmth and the summer sunshine lasts.

Almost as they reach the first court, a group divides, and a tall, stout person emerges from it.

"Miss Baxter!" cries Sir Fell, suddenly, with all the air of one who has lighted upon an unexpected, and most enchanting surprise. "Where *have* you been all day? I have been looking for you everywhere!" His *bonhomie*, though indeed it sounds a trifle forced to Sophie, who has just come up with them, sounds everything desirable to Miss Baxter, who receives it most amiably. She is a large, showy-looking woman of about forty, with a small eye and a determined jaw.

"Very good of you!" says she in a low bass voice that would have done credit to a Sergeant Major in the hour of action. "But I've been pretty well to the fore all the afternoon."

At this moment, Mrs. Vancourt, seeing her opportunity, turns to Ferris.

"Come with me round the lake," says she, in an imperious tone. "I want to speak to you."

The tone is almost too imperious. Ferris hesitates, and for a moment shows a disposition to revolt. Only for a

moment, however. What madness to dream that he can revolt! Is he not bound hand and foot—by honour? He almost laughs aloud as the word honour comes to him. What has *he* got to do with honour?

And this slight, fragile thing—a creature so frail, that one might readily believe that even a good gust of wind would blow her away into space—(Oh! that it *could*! but such gusts are not purchaseable!) For all her seeming fragility she is strong—strong as Fate! She is *his* Fate! A certainty that she will conquer him yet, renders him cold, nerveless, in spite of the defiance that he is doing his utmost to subdue in lip and eye. The memory of another, as slight, as fragile, is tormenting him. How like, and yet unlike, are the two on whom his mind is dwelling. One small, sweet body is clothed with grace, born of the spirit—the other, with a charming costume—a veritable confection, purchased from a West End establishment!

Alas! The fashionable frock is decidedly more likely to carry the day than “beauty’s dress,” which is poor Nora Creina’s best attire! Beauty may out-wear a frock or two, indeed, but beauty will not last for ever. It will fade, as surely as the frocks, and what is there to fall back upon in Nora’s case? Here truly Mrs. Vancourt has the pull over her lovely rival; for she has two possessions warranted to last as long as she does—her fortune and her temper!

“Well—aren’t you coming?” says she.

She looks up, and by ill-luck just at this moment Nora comes lightly across the sward, in their direction. She is talking to Mr. Carnegie, but her eyes are on Ferris.

“Oh! I see!” says Mrs. Vancourt, with a curious tightening of her straight lips. “Miss Carew wants you, perhaps. Well, for the moment I happen to want you too. You can choose, Cyril. How d’ye do, Miss Carew?” smiling, and nodding as sweetly to her as though “her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.” “Choose!” says she, in a sharp, wicked little tone, whilst still smiling at Nora, who has returned her bow gently, with a touch of embarrassment. “Which is it to be?”

“What a question!” says Ferris.

“An awkward one, I daresay. I am going this way,” turning in a direction that will lead her towards the lake, and directly away from where Nora is standing, a soft flush upon her face.

"So am I," says Ferris deliberately. He has caught one full entreating glance from Nora's eyes, a glance he had not dared to return, knowing his companion's sharp eyes are on him. He turns and walks away with her, raging hatred in his heart. Hatred of himself, and a far bitterer hatred against the woman at his side. He is a man always to lay the heavier weight of blame upon another. But, in truth, anyone might have pitied him now. The reproachful eyes seem to burn into him. What sin is not his with regard to her? Innocent as he would stand in the world's broad view, has he not yet destroyed in her, her faith in love, in truth, in honesty? Has he not, in a sense, betrayed her? He feels like Judas!

They have got to the brink of the lake now, and, walking along its side, soon disappear behind the trees that rise near it, tall and stately. Nora—where is Nora? He casts a swift glance behind him. Mrs. Vancourt catches it and laughs.

"She is with Mr. Carnegie now," says she, with a rather malignantly touch of amusement. "Would you disturb her? I know she is a friend of yours. You should study her—study her future, I mean; and really to study her in the present would not be amiss. I daresay it has never occurred to you that she has not only one, but a train of admirers; the fullest train I know. Your innocent Nora has not suggested herself to you in the light of a most distinguished coquette?"

"I don't see why you should imagine that I dwell so much upon No——Miss Carew."

"What a delightful little hesitation," says she, laughing. Her laugh is always light, and sweet, and catching. "But of course I know, being a man, you don't like to hear one woman run down by another. You are all that is chivalrous and truthful; still, I suppose there is no harm in my saying that I think if she married Mr. Carnegie, she would be doing very well for herself."

"No harm at all," says Ferris calmly, who is feeling as if he could willingly take her throat between his two hands and choke the life out of her.

"What a hypocrite you are, Cyril," says his companion, as if amused. "Come, tell me, where did you bury her, when I came upon the scene, awhile ago?"

CHAPTER XII.

"Oh! weary's our money—and weary's our wealth,
And sure we don't want them, while we have our health
'Twas they tempted Connor over the sea,
And I lost my lover, my *cushla machree!*"

—*Irish Ballad.*

HER? Who?" asks Ferris, staring at her as if amazed.
"You are surely not alluding to Miss Carew."

"To 'No——Miss Carew,'" mimicking him exactly as he spoke a minute ago. "Yes, I am. To her only. What a surprise!" mockingly. "Isn't it?"

"I don't follow you," says Ferris coldly. "I presume you allude to our meeting in the laurel shrubbery, awhile since. I fancied by your face, and that of Sir Fell's, that you expected a *dénouement* of some sort as you turned the corner. I felt almost sorry for your disappointment, there was no 'her,' and no 'scene,' so far as I know."

"So far as I know, rather." She stops suddenly, and by a little gesture compels him to stop too. "Look here, Cyril, we have known each other for a considerable time. In a sense, we belong to each other. You owe me something."

"Money—yes——" begins he.

"No. *Not* money!" cries she, stamping her foot upon the ground. "Who is thinking of money?"

"I was," says he deliberately.

"Well, I wasn't. You can misjudge me as much as you like, but money was not in my thoughts. You owe me friendship, at all events, and—love too. You know, even before poor John's death——"

"For Heaven's sake, Eldon, don't bring in 'poor John.' You know you cared as little for him, as," it is on the tip of his tongue to say, "as he did for you," but providentially he changes it in time to—"as I did."

"After all, he wasn't half bad," says she, petulantly.

"I'm glad you've found it out in time," says he, with a sarcastic smile.

"There is one thing," says she, pointedly. "I have nothing to reproach myself with, with regard to him."

"That must be an eternal satisfaction," says Ferris.

"How nasty you can be, Cyril. But I like you when you are nasty. You make me laugh. I want to be laughing always. But"—she looks at him, and the storm signal settles once more upon her brow—"I must get at the truth of this thing. *Who* was with you in the laurels?"

"What on earth do you mean?" says he. One would think I had not answered that question already."

"How innocent you look," says she with a sneer. "Do you think all people become deaf as well as blind just to oblige you?" She throws up her head, and the wind blows her fluffy pretty red hair into her eyes. She pushes it up again impatiently, and now he can see the eyes plainly, and the expression of them.

"Oh! what a brow, what awful eyes were hers;
'Twas Hera flashing from her midnight orbs
The soul of Pallas like a star."

She is looking her best certainly, but malignant. The brown-red hair and white brow, and the brilliant, angry eyes beneath, all make a whole. She is a perfect picture of a most imperfect nature! Again the calm, lovely face of Nora rises before Ferris's mind.

"Come, answer me!" says she, still patting the ground with her foot.

"I tell you, you must explain," says Ferris in a dull way; his mind for the moment is clogged. He is trying indeed not so much to remember what she is saying, as to forget how Nora is looking!

"Well, I'll explain," says she, her eyes still clear and blue, and furious. "Was Nora Carew with you just now?"

"Miss Carew? Certainly not."

"Do you think," says she, as if choking, "that I did not hear voices?"

"Very probably you did! Good Heavens, Eldon, what is the good of your going on like this! There were many people in the laurel walk. It is a kind of maze, as you know. One goes in here, and out there, if you can find your way, and——"

"You are clever, as I said!" She pauses. "It is, perhaps unfortunate that I am clever too, in the same, low, cunning fashion!"

Her eyes are now blazing. Ferris takes no notice of this stinging little pleasantry.

"Why don't you speak?" says she, losing all control over herself. "You *know* that girl was with you! Do you think I have not *heard* about you and her? Of your being in love with her, of your making appointments with her—dancing with her?—About the love"—viciously—"I have had no fear. You could never be in love but with one person."

"You!" says he promptly. "I am glad you have done me some sort of justice!"

"With me? No. With yourself!" She hesitates, and, as if a little mollified by his last speech, goes on more gently: "I tell you this, Cyril, that all I want is to believe in you. But how is it possible? Come, swear to me now that I was wrong in my supposition."

"Swear what?"

"That I did not see you and Miss Carew go up to that laurel maze together."

"Certainly I shan't swear that," says he. He has now quite recovered himself, and taking her by both arms, sways her tenderly, lovingly, to and fro. "Why what a silly little girl you are!" (He has learned by experience than she likes to be called a girl.) "Miss Carew wanted to go up to that walk to meet her sister, who was with Butler."

"With Mr. Butler?"

"Yes. You know there is a—well, an understanding between those two, and I took her there, and——"

"She met her sister?"

"No, I'm sorry to say. Not exactly on the spot, but she saw her at a distance and ran after her. I didn't quite like to explain all that before Sir Fell, who is a little unkind to the girls, I have heard, and specially objects to Sophie's love affair with Butler, but now, *you* know how it is."

"Do I?" says she. "It is a pretty story! But—I shall ask Miss Carew about it."

"Perhaps you hardly understand how extremely insolent you are," says Ferris calmly, yet with a look at her—a look that has hatred in it. It frightens her. Her courage fails her. All her small, shallow soul is given to Ferris. To lose him would be to lose the best thing her life contains.

"How am I insolent?" asks she, as if to gain time.

"You tell me, in polite words, that I lie."

"Nonsense Cyril," says she lightly. "Insolent! What a word between you and me. After all, what a worry we are making out of nothing. I daresay I was wrong. I am *sure* now that I was wrong; but . . . say so. She wasn't there then."

"You still persist!" asks he, encouraged by the weakness that she has betrayed. He makes a mistake there.

"I *do* persist," returns she sullenly. Recognising duplicity in his last question, she now grows once more suspicious. "Come—answer me!" cries she with a sort of suppressed violence.

Ferris draws a sharp breath. One would always rather *not* lie, if possible, and he hesitates. A good deal, as he knows, depends upon his answer now. Eldon Vancourt, if not well born is certainly well endowed, and to throw away the fortune she so freely offers him is—well—to ask a good deal of a good-for-nothing, fashionable, utterly worthless young man.

"Look here Eldon," says he, "I'll humour you so far as to discuss the matter with you. If Miss Carew *was* with me on the laurel walk when you came up, where do you think she could be spirited away to on the spot?"

"There was a corner," says she, with a suspicious half-closing of her lids.

"And if she went round the corner, why not I go with her? Come now, Eldon, isn't there a great deal of folly mixed up with your accusations. And why accuse me at all? You seem to think I did not want to see you when you came up that walk? If so, why did I not go away? There was a corner for me too! Do you know you are the unkindest girl on earth, I think. Shall I tell you who I was thinking about when you came up to me?"

"Miss Carew!" says she, but her voice is softer, and she casts a swift glance at him, that has nothing of anger in it now—and only a fading suspicion. That word "girl" always pleases her. Though still rather young, so far as years ago, she is for all that much older than Nora, and she has been through a good deal, and feels at times, when alone with her own thoughts and memories, a little battered—a trifle seamed by life's battle.

"Nonsense!" says Ferris gaily. "You know better than that!" He takes her hands, and holding them, swings them lightly from side to side. He is laughing.

He has now quite entered into the spirit of his lie, and is determined (finds it easy indeed) to say all that she requires of him. If he does not marry her, there is nothing before him but perdition—and yet, to marry her Once again a soft, young, trusting face rises before him. “You—” pausing and letting his eyes look tenderly into hers—“who are the one woman on earth who is anything to me.”

“Is that true!” She seems to search him with her eyes. “I could be much to you,” says she at last.

“Yes. But . . . consider,” says he quickly. “I—I *dare* not ask you to marry me, Eldon. I, without a penny, you, with everything!”

“Do you think that counts with me?” says she. “No. No. If I were only *sure* that you loved me—not even me alone,” paling, until her thin lips grow white, “but me best of all—I should be content.”

“But what of me?” says Ferris, pressing her palms fondly. “Have I no honour, no desire to show myself in a good light to the one I love? No. You must let me wait until I am in a better position”

She interrupts him by a quick burst of laughter.

“I shall wait for ever at that rate,” says she. Then seeing the queer, quick change in his face, a change hardly to be described, but of which the principal mixture is disgust, “Don’t be angry with me,” says she. “Of course I didn’t mean it, and if you make a name for yourself over something or other, I shall be very proud. But!” with a little smiling frown, “what a dull day we are having. Come, tell me now, what do you want for Newmarket?”

“Not a penny,” says he.

“Well now I *know* you are angry,” says she, making her little criticism (so terribly *mal à propos*) without understanding it. To be underbred is nothing in a case of this kind (or thousands of others that require nice management), because many underbred people are full of feeling. But to be devoid of breeding, as well as feeling, is fatal!

“How do you know it?” There is thunder in his air—suppressed, but ready to break forth at any moment. “Do you mean that——”

“I mean nothing,” says she, in a little hurried sort of way.

“You mean that I already owe you money,” says he, his

face white with wrath and self-anger—(that bitterest anger of all)—“Well that is true, but soon I hope to be able to repay you.” This hope is as light as gossamer, considering the present state of his finances.

“Cyril, don’t talk to me like that,” says she, flinging away his hands and gazing at him with bright and passionate eyes. “What is money to me, what is *anything*, if only I can tell myself that you love me? You do—don’t you? Cyril—remember!”

“I remember,” says he. “Do you think I could forget?” His lips are firmly set together—he looks indeed as if to remember was too easy to him, to forget impossible, and his whole face is full of anguish.

“Why do you look like that?” demands she suddenly.

“Like what?”

“Like one condemned!”

“Well, is it not your fault?” He lays his hands upon her shoulders, and takes possession of her, as it were. “I *am* like one condemned when you are unkind to me, when you—cast me off. There Eldon, you know how it is between you and me, and I *think* you love me.”

“That is not the question,” says she, paling in turn. “Do you love me?”

“You know it!”

“And still you talk of waiting?”

“Because. Well—I would be worthy of you?”

“Cyril! If I found you false——” She thrusts him back from her and, still with her little hands on him, examines his features with a slow sort of passion. “You *will* be true?” asks she. “This waiting is not all pretence? you *want* to marry me?”

“It is my one desire,” returns he, slowly, solemnly.

CHAPTER XIII.

"There's a colleen fair as May
For a year and for a day
I've sought by every way—Her heart to gain.
There's no art of tongue or eye
Fond youths with maidens try
But I've tried with ceaseless sigh—Yet tried in vain."

MEANTIME Sir Fell Anketell and Miss Baxter have been doing a *pas seul* business in the shape of a *tête-à-tête* to the admiration of all beholders except two. Nora and Sophie, standing a little to the right, have been listening to Sir Fell's conversation with his companion with an astonishment that borders on disgust. Anything like Sir Fell's *bonhomie*, his gaiety, his *smartness* (it is the smartness that reduces the girls to the borders of [open in-subordination), his urbanity, you never saw.

"He's regularly going it," says Eusebius Brush, who has come up to Nora, and with Mr. Carnegie is making a sandwich of her. "Heaven alone—and Miss Baxter—knows where this will end."

"In the breach of promise court for choice," says Denis Putler, who is talking to Sophie but has overheard Eusebius.

"Hardly. He means business this time," says the latter.

"Yes—but *she*? would any sane woman marry him? And he—he would be just the one contemptible fellow in the world to bring an action against a woman."

"There will be no action," says Eusebius. "She'll marry him."

"Oh! do you really think so?" asks Sophie.

"I really do."

"Then what is to become of us?" disconsolately.

"I should say, you would be in far better case than you are at present," says Eusebius. "He will be able to divide his favours more, to spread them abroad—he will in fact have three to dance upon, instead of two."

"But we?" says Sophie. "How about Nora and me?
—we shall have *two* to dance on us, instead of one."

Mr. Brush runs his hand over his large, cleanly-shaven face.

"That's awkward, certainly," says he. "If one thinks of her foot! Fives, if an inch, I should say, and feel charitable afterwards. I don't believe even her *little* toe is light or fantastic!"

"Nora, are you listening?" says Sophie. "Do you hear. It is just as we thought. Eusebius says Sir Fell is going to marry Miss Baxter."

"Is he?" says Nora.

"What a tone! Don't you care? Fancy having a step-mother!"

"Well—why not?" says Nora; she smiles faintly; "I really *don't* care—I don't care about anything," says she. She looks indeed, at this moment, as if all things in Heaven and earth are indifferent to her. Sophie regards her intently for a moment and then turns away.

"I daresay it is all only talk," says she to Butler. "She is hideous, and of no birth, and Sir Fell likes people to be well-born. He can't bear the Kinsellas, for example. Now, ugly as she is, if she had only a title, I could believe in it, but as it is——"

"She has an excellent title," says Eusebius. "She is entitled to ten thousand a year by all accounts, and they say the business is increasing every day."

"Oh, not that sort of title!"

"I tell you it is a first-class one," says Eusebius. "You can meet many a woman who is a Peeress. But it is one in a thousand who is a Beeress! Miss Baxter is a Beeress!"

"Is it *beer*?" says Sophie, "we always thought it was soap or tallow: she is English then?"

"Yes. Liverpool, I fancy. Take my advice, Sophie and cultivate her. If Sir Fell gives her his lean title, in exchange for her stout ten thousand per annum, I think it will be worth your while to make yourself civil."

"I shan't," says Sophie. "She is vulgar and noisy, and abominable in every way."

"Take care!" says Butler in a low tone, "they are coming this way."

Sir Fell indeed is almost behind her. He has come up to them once more with Miss Baxter in tow, and is beaming all over. His genial smiles, and his brilliant glances are

things to behold. His tall, lean, aristocratic figure is drawn up to its fullest height, and benevolent sparkles light his eyes. He is, as I have said, a distinctly handsome man, with eyes like a hawk, thin, well-cut lips,

"And I tell you in good certain
He had a seemly nose."

as old Chaucer would have it.

"Hah!" says he, and his eye meets Sophie's. "You, my dear girl—and Nora! Miss Baxter, will you permit me to introduce to you, my two dear daughters?"

He bends his lean carcase over Miss Baxter's stout one, and questions her with delightful deference. Miss Baxter nods her head in true masculine style. She makes a movement of one of her big hands that is meant to be one of graceful acquiescence.

Miss Baxter, however, is not altogether dependent upon her hands for size. She is big in every way. Her friends call her a fine woman—her foes a "porpoise." It will kindly be remembered that both her friends and foes are culled from the ranks. She has a healthy appetite, an unflinching amount of small talk, and a poodle!

This poodle exercises her much, both in mind and body, specially body. She walks it very carefully twice a day, she has indeed of late years developed a strong faith in the "constitutional," as beneficial to the poodle. Her foes (but nobody ever pays attention to the sayings of foes) declare she keeps the poodle as an excuse for exercising *herself*, because "Poor Miranda grows so fat!"

Miranda is her name. It can hardly be said to suit her, yet she glories in it. To her there is a touch not only of romance but of high breeding in it. Thus might a Princess of the blood Royal be called, or even a paltry Duchess! As a rule, to her intimates, she signs herself *Miranda B.* A Baxter might be *anybody*—but a Miranda! . . .

Miranda's manners are not her strong point. They are loud. They are downright; terribly downright. A spade, to the fair Miranda, is always a spade. Her edges are all rough, her corners sharp. As a conclusion of the whole matter, there isn't a single "frill" about her anywhere.

"These are my dear daughters," says Sir Fell, with quite a coquettish smile. "Sophie—Nora—let me introduce you to Miss Baxter."

"How d'ye do, girls?" says Miss Baxter, in a loud, hearty tone.

"This is Nora!" says Sir Fell, laying his hand on Nora's arm with a glowing smile. He would have preferred to bring Sophie forward, but in a way he is always a little afraid of her.

"I've seen you before, haven't I?" says Miss Baxter, with a scrutinizing smile. "Down in the village, one day, wasn't it? The Lacys have been wondering why you haven't been near them, these weeks."

"Sir Fell said he couldn't let us have the horse," says Sophie instantly, in the sweetest, gentlest, little way.

Denis Butler gives her frock a pull behind.

"What's the *good* of putting his back up," whispers he.

"Not a bit of good—only I love to see his face when he's mad," says she maliciously.

"They shall call. They shall call at once," says Sir Fell, after one swift, withering glance at Sophie, who misses it, having turned aside to give way to the laughter that is consuming her. "As dear Sophie has very justly said, I could not spare one of the horses of late. A busy time of year on a farm, you see, where,"—with a deprecatory, but charming little gesture—"there is not much money. And, besides, we hardly thought you would care for the visits of two harum-scarum children, eh? They are a little shy, you see, and——Well, well, well! They will be honoured, indeed, now they know you would like them to call."

"It was the Lacys who were talking about it. 'Twasn't me," says Miss Baxter.

"I can quite understand that," says Sir Fell. "But the girls will be delighted to go and see you soon, won't you, girls?"

"Delighted!" says Nora coldly.

"You look it!" says Miss Baxter, with a laugh as big as herself.

It rings through the air, dies away, and silence follows it. There now indeed ensues an awkward pause, with which even Sir Fell hardly knows how to deal. Sophie, however, whom it is difficult to embarrass, employs this brief interlude in a careful examination of the author of the late bombshell. Beneath that showy exterior, what is there? Power, certainly, and a strong will, and what else? Is it honesty? At all events there can be no doubt about the

strength of her will. Sophie recognizes this fact with a shiver of inward satisfaction. Whatever the future step-mother may prove to her or Nora, she will certainly prove a stumbling block in the path of Sir Fell. He, at all events is bound to find her an interesting subject.

"Oh! That he *may*!" says naughty Sophie to her own heart. There is even a delicious throb of hope in her bosom. From this moment she decides to further Sir Fell's marriage with "the Beeress" with all her might.

All these righteous thoughts flow through Sophie's mind in a second, and Sir Fell is still struggling with himself to bring forth a charming speech that shall do away with Miss Baxter's late pleasantry, when a tall man, of middle age, with all the airs, however, of a youthful Adonis, appears upon the scene. It is Peter Kinsella.

"Lady Saggartmore has sent me to ask if you are not all comin' in to tea," says he, in a high, most elegant tone, and a swaying bow of his body that includes everyone in the group, and reduces his form to a corkscrew.

"We're coming. We're coming," cries Sir Fell, who hails this break with delight, and who is once more terribly genial. He seems, indeed, overflowing with good humour, at such a rate, that one cannot help fearing the supply cannot last—that it is inadequate to the tremendous demand made upon it. "Miss Baxter, will you permit me to take you to the conservatory? Tea is there, I think, Mr. Kinsella, eh? Yes—yes. Girls, you will come too? Really, Miss Baxter, after all, I feel I should not monopolise you so entirely, and I should like you to make my daughters' acquaintance. I hope, my dear girls," with a roving glance from Sophie to Nora and back again, a rather nervous, speedy glance—a glance that is distinctly afraid of its reception—"you have not been over-exerting yourselves. You must pardon me, Miss Baxter, but I assure you I always dread the sun for these dear children—they are so full of fun and life. I am anxious always. A poor, wifeless man like me," with a sudden uplifting of hands and brows, "is always filled with apprehensions for those he loves. No one to help him, you see, to lighten his burden. Dear Nora, you look very warm."

Nora is as white as a sheet.

"I seldom felt cooler," returns she, in a low tone, in which the disgust is but barely conaled.

"Warm! She looks like a ghost!" cries Miss Baxter, giving way to another loud burst of merriment. "Ha—ha—ha! You don't seem to understand 'em much. Made a mistake there, eh?"

"Ah, well!" says Sir Fell, still smiling, though in rather ghastly fashion now, and with a faint contraction of the brows, that means mischief to somebody later on. "I see I have you all against me. But," archly, and with his hawk eyes and aristocratic nose now bent upon Miss Baxter, "you must not encourage them in rebellion against me. We all hope to reckon you amongst our friends, but you mustn't spoil the girls. No really! Well, shall we come? Sophie, I am sure you will accompany Miss Baxter, and Nora," with a steady glance at Nora, "I know you will come with me."

Nora colours faintly; she glances a little helplessly from side to side. It seems impossible for her to refuse, and yet—to go.

"Miss Carew has promised to let me take her in to tea," says Carnegie suddenly, whose eyes are as usual on her small, pathetic, little face, and who has noticed the desire or escape so largely written in it. He tells his harmless ie quite calmly, and with an air difficult to combat.

"Hah! very good, Forestalled, I see," says Sir Fell, with a last desperate attempt at gaiety. "Never mind, Nora, don't be remorseful! I shall," with an airy wave of the hand to her, and a swift, malignant glance, "have a chat with you, later on."

He follows Miss Baxter and Sophie, and his high cackling laughter can be heard until they turn into the conservatory, where tea is being served.

"Do you wish to go in?" asks Carnegie, letting his eyes rest on Nora's.

"No. Not yet. By-and-bye," says she restlessly.

"You will prefer a walk?"

"Yes, I think."

"Come then," says he. He turns towards the lake, and Nora, in a listless way, accompanies him. It is the very way Cyril and Mrs. Vancourt had gone, but that suits her. It is almost sure they will not return this way, but will go round by the upper walk, and to meet them now is the last thing that she desires. She feels dull and out of spirits. She is wishing with all her heart that Mr. Carnegie would

go away, and leave her to take her walk alone. It is terrible to her to have him there, expecting her to talk to him, to answer him, to have even to suggest topics of conversation. She seems to have no speech left in her, no desire for it. She would have liked to tell herself that her head aches—but her head is perfectly well—there is no ache anywhere. She will not allow herself to think that there is an ache in that worst place of all—her heart.

"Did you honestly mean what you said awhile ago?" asks Carnegie presently.

"'Awhile ago'? What did I say awhile ago?"

"That you did not care about anything."

"Oh! *that*. Well—I daresay," returns she.

"But a child like you!" says he, regarding her earnestly, his kind grey eyes full of interest. "What a view to take of life!"

"The best view."

"Oh, no! To be indifferent at your age, is to be miserable later on. One *must* have a belief in something. It is necessary."

"You would have me bow down to care, then," says she, "carking care!"

"I would indeed. Rather than see you care for nothing."

"Yet 'Care's an enemy to life.' Would you have me make friends with life's enemy?"

"I would have you be true to your own self," says he gently. He pauses, and then—"All this is mere talk. What I really dread for you, is that you should care—too much."

A quick flush warms her face, then dies away again, leaving it, if possible, paler than before. Her dark eyes shine like stars in the pallor of their surroundings.

"Dread nothing for me," says she slowly, her eyes upon the ground. "Why should you think of me at all? Believe me, it is my greatest desire, that neither you, nor any other person, should ever waste a moment's thought upon me."

"I was wrong," says he in a tone as low as her own. "I should not have ventured so far. I should not have spoken at all. I have only one excuse——" He pauses. "Unfortunately I cannot get you out of my mind," says he.

Something in this—who can tell what?—amuses Nora.

All at once she laughs—delightfully, merrily. She glances at him from under lids. It is a little laugh that hardly conveys its full meaning, but to Carnegie it is sweet. It is at all events an assurance that if his love is of no importance to her, it is certainly not an offence!

"You ought to correct your mind," says she, "it seems terribly from under control!"

At this he laughs too, as if compelled to it, by the pretty maliciousness of hers. It occurs to her, looking at him, that perhaps, after all, he *is* younger than they say.

"Well, I shall not presume to criticise you again," says he. "I shall I believe be even afraid to look at you, after that last dreadful glance you gave me. I had even my doubts about *saying* something to you."

"What is it?" asks she.

"You give me leave to speak then?"

"Yes. Do I look like a Gorgon?" says she. Again she gives him a little smile from beneath her lowered lids. To his own future sorrow, he has helped her to forget—and the spirit of coquetry that warms the heart of all women is now awake in hers.

"Is that a question?" asks he. "If so I refuse to answer it. No, you shall answer one of mine instead. Sir Fell has asked me to go up to Dunmore some evening, to have a cigar with him. If I go, shall I see you—and your sister?" The latter part of this sentence is a palpable addition.

"Certainly," says Nora. She hesitates, as if uncertain and a little ashamed. "He did not ask you to dinner?"

"No. To come up later on, and have a smoke with him. It is a usual thing," says he quickly.

"Not here. Not in the country. But, after all," steadily "I am glad he did not ask you to dinner. We—we have no cook."

"I don't think I should mind about that," says he. "What I *do* mind is, whether you would like me to come, and whether, if I do come, I shall see you."

"We shall be very glad to see you," says Nora, with a politeness that renders him miserable.

"That is what you would say to anyone. After all, I suppose I *am* anyone. Well, I may come then, and when?"

"As soon as you like."

"Really? You mean it? I shall take you at your word," says he. He is looking at her, and something in her face checks him as he would have gone on with his speech. Her brows have contracted, her eyes are gazing in a strange fashion towards the corner beyond; almost instantly, however—even as he looks at her—her expression changes, she turns to him smiling, radiant, her lips and eyes alight with friendly feeling. Puzzled, bewildered, Carnegie looks back at her.

"Yes. Come; come *soon*! Is not *that* kind? Have you nothing to say to me *now*?" cries she petulantly—still smiling, still evidently eager to be gay—feverishly gay. Driven by some occult feeling, Carnegie lets his eyes travel towards the walk round the lake. There before him are two people turning the corner.

They are Ferris and Mrs. Vancourt.

"Nothing," says Carnegie slowly.

"Well, *I'll* say something," says she, "if you will not. Have you not thought that I want my tea? Come." She has been smiling at him all the time, but now she makes a little movement towards him, and taps him lightly on the arm; it is the friendliest little gesture, and thrills him, though he knows well the reason for it. Her slight fingers linger on his arm—her lovely eyes are smiling into his; it occurs to him that her heart is breaking.

CHAPTER XIV.

"Ah! my heart is weary waiting,
Waiting for the May,
Waiting for the pleasant rambles,
Where the fragrant hawthorn brambles,
With the woodbine alternating,
Scent the dewy way.
Ah! my heart is weary waiting,
Waiting for the May."

THE long, sweet, lovely day has waned to its end. Now Death claims it. The light is fast dying away, and only a delicate twilight reigns. Already a little, pale, sweet moon—a little moon just born—is smiling overhead.

Yet, even now, the last memories of a glorious sunset may be caught, down there to the west, where the river flows. Bank upon bank of cloud one sees—steel-grey, with blacker touches here and there—and through them gleams

of fierce crimson, as though the sun is dying hard, and valiantly fighting his way inch by inch—second by second. On the small stream below, on field and tree, and bank, this rich red glow lies quivering.

Here, in the old flower garden, “where the silver-sandalled shadows” lie so lightly, the last faint chirpings of the sleepy birds can still be heard, with the vague flutterings of their wings, as they seek out a leafy resting-place to spend the night. Not yet, however, have the little heads gone beneath the wings—the music of their twitterings still stirs the silent air, broken only by them, and the soft dropping of the water over the shining stones in the little streamlet in the wood.

The tall elms, and spreading beeches, show dark against the sky, blotting out, in certain places, the pale young moon, that looks like one “born out of due time,” so faint so vague it shows in the still lingering daylight. A heavy odour as of dying flowers is on the air.

“Are you really determined to meet him this evening, Nora?” asks Sophie, after a longer silence than usual. The two girls are pacing up and down the gravelled paths, slowly, thoughtfully, as befits the stillness of the evening. They seem quite in unison with it, indeed, in their white frocks and bare arms, and the little soft lace frills that lie about their snowy throats. Such old frocks, such older laces, but such youthful arms and throats.

Dinner, always a trial of strength to them at Dunmore, is now mercifully at an end. Sir Fell, as is his happy wont, has betaken himself to his cigars (the best that can be had)—his brandy (not to be questioned)—and his many thoughts—which indeed would leave themselves much open to question, could they be seen in black and white—so that the girls are free to wander where they choose at their own sweet will.

“I am never determined, I think,” says Nora, with a little smile that is sweet, but has yet something of self-scorn in it. “I wish I could be. I should not then be so everlastingly frightened at what other people would say. But—I should like to go, Sophie.” There is a distinct craving for sympathy in this last. “I—I *said* I would.”

“I know what that means,” says Sophie, shortly. “‘What has a gentleman but his word?’ and so on. I suppose it has never occurred to you that it is pretty late.”

Even as she speaks, the old clock in the tower rings out the quarter to nine.

"We very often go down to the little wood at this hour," says Nora.

"Yes, often. But to meet some one?"

"It is only to meet Cyril! I *told* him I should be there. And to bring him to the bridge, and then stay away—that would be rude, wouldn't it?" asks she timidly.

"Better be rude than foolish," says Sophie brusquely.

"But how foolish? You will be with me?"

"Of course I shall go with you," says Sophie. "You know I would go with you anywhere, but——" She pauses. "I wish you did not care so much for Cyril. I *do* wish that, Nolly, though it makes you angry. I wish, too, and this,"—with an anxious glance at her—"will make you more angry—that you *did* care for Mr. Carnegie."

"What nonsense!" says Nora. "Mr. Carnegie! Why do you drag him into this discussion? Why he cares for me as little as I care for him."

"How can you say that, Nora!" says Sophie, who is a terribly downright person, and with a distinctly well-balanced head upon her shoulders. "Do you think I couldn't see all day how things were going on? Why, of course, every one saw it all. Every bit of it. Mr. Carnegie simply *devoted* himself to you. He followed you about from pillar to post. He thought of nobody but you. In my opinion,"—solemnly—"he *saw* nobody but you! Not that I would impugn his eye-sight. In my opinion, again, it is excellent!"

"You are partial," says Nora. It may be an excellent thing to be blind when one loves. Tradition leads that way—but I prefer to be seen and judged, and put on my merits, and so chosen."

"Few would refuse you at that rate, Nora," says her sister, but very sadly. "There are other things, however! Things that people—*men*—would rather have, than beauty of soul and body."

"One would think man was your natural enemy," says Nora, with a rather wan smile. "How you abuse him. What is it then that man would rather have than beauty of soul and body?"

"Money!" says Sophie, distinctly. Yet, within her, she feels as if a knife had been drawn across her heart.

"Money!" says Nora. She looks full at her sister, and then turns aside and, catching at a fuchsia-bush, pulls its flowers to pieces.

"Money!" repeats she presently—she drops all the poor fuchsia blossoms on the ground, "You are thinking of something, Sophie! You are meaning something. Say it! Say it! Say what you mean!"

"Well, I will," says Sophie, desperately. "I think—I think, darling—(Oh! *don't* be angry with me, Nolly), I think you ought to give up Cyril."

There is a long silence. Even the twittering of the birds has ceased. They have gone to sleep. Only these two hearts, as it seems to themselves, are wide awake in all this sweet, dewy, lovely evening. Nora is the first to speak. She moves back from her sister. She even waves her a little aside.

"You have thought that for so long," says she, "that your words do not impress me. I know you have always hated poor Cyril."

"But why—but why?" asks Sophie. "You seem to know everything—Do you know *that*? Have you ever asked yourself *why* I hated him?"

"No——" Nora hesitates; defiant as her attitude has been up to this, she now shrinks a little from the reply she has provoked.

"Because he is false," says Sophie, plainly. "I told you, awhile ago, that I did not know whether I liked or disliked him; but now, I know, He is uncertain. He is like the wind. He wavers; even *Love* could not compel him to stand steady."

"You must have some reason for saying all this," says Nora, who has been regarding her and listening to her with suppressed agitation.

"Well, I have," says Sophie. "You can forgive me, or love me, or hate me for it, as you will—but I shall say now what is in my heart."

"A moment!" says Nora, checking her. "Is it what is in *your* heart, or in the heart of Denis?"

"That is unworthy of you," says Sophie slowly. "There is no one on earth with whom I would discuss *you*. Surely, Nora, you believe that."

"Oh! I do," cries Nora remorsefully. "I do, indeed. Go on, Sophie, say what you want to say; I shall not misjudge you again."

"Well! There is Mrs. Vancourt," says Sophie bluntly, armed for this strife, with fresh accoutrements, welded out of Nora's sneer of a moment since. In very fact her soul is bleeding for her sister, but to help her—to *save* her—must lead both of them through sorry quagmires.

"Mrs. Vancourt! Why should I think of her?" Poor Nora's stock of courage all at once runs very low.

"Because!" Sophie stops dead short—*her* amount of courage runs even lower. All at once she feels as if she is being brutal to some one, and that one Nora, her sister—her darling—her pretty Noll. Yet to draw back would be cowardly, when she knows that Nora's eyes should be opened by someone. How she wishes, however, that she was not that one. "You must remember, Nora," says she, "that you yourself said things about her—*hinted* things, I mean, about her and Cyril, the other day in the orchard. Now, what if those things be true?"

"They are not true," says Nora coldly. "And I regret I ever mentioned her name to you. If I had known that every silly word I ever said was going to be remembered against me, and quoted *years* afterwards——"

"Years? Why it was the other day——"

"It is all the same"—this most unjustly. "At all events, *had* I known, I should never have spoken. And besides," turning passionately upon her, with pale cheeks, and glowing eyes that seem to fill the whole of the small delicate face, "you *must* have understood then that I hardly knew what I was saying, that Sir Fell had enraged me, and that—that——"

"I wish you had meant it," says Sophie, a little vehement in turn; then, suddenly turning to her, "What on earth do you *see* in him?" says she.

Now this is unwise. This is the signal for battle. One should never in strained situations ask a leading question. It generally means bloodshed later on—in this case, it means bloodshed on the spot.

"He is handsome at all events!" says Nora promptly—and I regret to say spitefully. Her heart, poor child, at this moment, is full of bitterness. Denis Butler is far from handsome.

"Certainly," acquiesces Sophie equably, though her own spirit is rising. "He is one of the handsomest people I know—whilst Denis——" she stops, and all at once, the

comic side of the affair coming to her, she laughs, a quick hearty laugh that drives out all ill-temper. "And Denis is the ugliest. But extremes meet you know, and to me, Denis is so ugly, that he borders upon beauty whilst Cyril is so beautiful that (to me again *only*, of course) he is positively ugly. And, besides, as Denis says——"

"Oh! Bother Denis!" says Nora, losing all patience now, and shrugging up one shoulder—the one nearest to Sophie. "I am *sick* of Denis! It is Denis this, and Denis that, and Denis the other thing, all over the place; morning, noon, and night. *Do* try and get an original idea. One of your own—one at all events that doesn't belong to Denis."

"Poor Denis!" says Sophie, in a very soft little tone. She pauses. And then: "Do you know, Nora, that Denis loves you?"

"I don't *care*," says Nora violently. "I hate him—I hate everybody, I think——" she stops, and all at once bursts into tears. "Oh, no, Sophie! Oh, no!" sobs she, covering her face with one hand and holding out the other to Sophie. "I am a wretch; I am not worth the love you give me. You," as Sophie's strong fond arms close round her, "you will give me up soon. I know you will! But I *used* to be good-natured, Sophie—usen't I now? And really, ducky, I didn't mean a *bit* I said about Denis. I am as fond of him as I can be, and—I think him *quite* good-looking! I don't know how I could have called him ugly, except that I was in such a temper; and really *nobody* would think of his nose, when they look into his eyes."

"I do," says Sophie, patting her valiantly on the back, and giving her a fond little hug. "I always think of his nose. It's a *frightful* nose! Why *couldn't* he have grown a better one when he was about it? But I've forgiven him that. And," here she returns to her normal state, and her sense of fun, and leaning back from Nora, shakes her to and fro gaily, whilst a little irrepressible ripple of laughter widens her lips, "and I'm glad you have too."

"It's a heavenly nose!" says Nora, giving way to mirth also; indeed poor Butler's nose, as has been already hinted, aims towards the sky. "And you know I regard Denis as my dearest friend."

"No more of this," cries Sophie gaily. "Do you want to

madden me with jealousy? Come. If you are going down to the bridge, it is time we started."

"You *will* come, then?" cries Nora eagerly.

"Yes; under protest," says Sophie laughing. She tucks her arm into her sister's and together they go towards the lawn, past Sir Fell's smoking room, and down presently into the little wood below, where the river runs, now clad in mists and twilight dim.

CHAPTER XV.

"Many a lover hath the rose,
When June's musk-wind breathes and blows;
And in many a bower is heard
Her sweet praise from bee and bird.

Through the gold hours dreameth she,
In her own heart passionately;
Her fair face, hung languid-wise,
O! her breath of honey and spice!"

—*Irish Ballad.*

THE little river is running sweet and low, the tiny music of it making chinks in the silent air. Every corner seems rich with shadows, and the waving branches of the trees increase the blackness of them. Over everything, indeed,

"Dewy fingers draw
The gradual dusky veil."

All is silence—and only the little stream runs eloquent.

"It is dark down here, isn't it?" says Nora, as the two girls wend their way through lawn and heavy grass, still uncut, and waiting to be made into hay, to the still wood beyond.

"It is always dark where the shadows lie," says Sophie, who, having gone in for it, is determined to see the whole matter through with a high courage.

"Perhaps," says Nora. She is evidently rather frightened, and, at this last moment, she pushes her hand through Sophie's arm as if desirous of taking strength from her.

"But—if he shouldn't be here, Nora?"

"Then let us be thankful for small mercies," is on the tip of Sophie's tongue; but, doubtless, a sense of grace lays an embargo on it.

"He is sure to be here," says she, "and," pointing lightly downwards, "what is that upon the bridge? A figure, surely!"

"A figure!" says Nora. She takes a little eager step forward, and then, as if recollecting herself, and feeling ashamed of having betrayed her emotion so openly, she suddenly drops into a pace that would have distinguished a funeral, and swings a little branch she holds from side to side, as if indifferent to all things.

"Nora!" says Sophie, taking no notice of this flagrant attempt at indifference, "I suppose you will want me to go away when you meet him?"

"Him?"

"Oh! stuff!" says Sophie. "As if you can't see him on the bridge as well as I can. He's big enough for even a bat to see by this light. Go on! *Am* I to stay when we meet him, or not?"

"Oh, I don't know!" says Nora, colouring. "What do *you* think Sophie? What would *you* do?"

"I should, tell you to get out," says Sophie promptly. "I should *loathe* the girl who sat *me* out when I was with the man I loved—when"—honestly—"I was with Denis, so I shall leave you alone presently, when I have said, 'How d'ye do?' to Cyril."

"Very well," says Nora. "I shouldn't mind your being there all the time, Sophie—I"—eagerly—"shouldn't *really*, only—there is something I want to say to Cyril—to ask him about, and—I could do it easier, if——"

"All right, Nolly. You needn't put it on paper for me," says Sophie, who understands perfectly all about it. There is a little pang at her heart as she remembers the expression in Nora's eyes as Mrs. Vancourt had carried off Cyril that afternoon. How is he going to explain that to her now? What plausible excuse is on his ready tongue. Sophie stifles a sigh, and slipping her arm into Nora's, goes briskly forward.

It is growing very dark down here amongst the trees; the pale little moon is not strong enough to pierce through the heavy branches, and on the bridge itself the shadows lie heaviest. The figure on the bridge has not stirred since first the girls saw it, and is still leaning over the wooden railing, as if lost in thought, or fascinated by the quick, sweet rushing of the little river below him. It is a broad,

yet eager little river, with here and there calm stretches where large lily leaves lie tossing lazily, and where the banks are crowded with the yellow water iris, the flower that children call the "flag," and the leaves of which they take and bend and form into miniature fleets, and with great hopes, and excitement that thrills their little bursting hearts, sail them down almost every river in the kingdom.

"That you, Cyril?" calls Sophie, as they draw nearer, seeing that Ferris has not turned. Her voice does not reach him evidently, as still he does not stir.

"I—is it he at all?" asks Nora nervously, stopping and pulling a little at Sophie's arm. "I—I think I'll go back."

"Well, perhaps it will be better," says Sophie, joyfully acceding to this suggestion. "I daresay he is in one of his tantrums. You can see him to-morrow, you know."

"To-morrow! It is a long way off," says Nora—a sudden feeling coming to her that she dare not face the terrible, interminable sleepless night, without hearing him say he does not care for Mrs. Vancourt. "No, let us go on."

"As you will," says Sophie, shrugging her shoulders. "Shall I call him again? Or shall we announce our presence in a joyful, surprise, sort of way, by chucking him into the river?" Sophie is feeling a little vicious.

"Call out again," says Nora.

So Sophie says "Cyril" at the top of her lungs this time, and with such acumen, that if the quiet figure on the bridge had been one of the Seven Sleepers he must have awakened.

He starts at once into a standing position, and, seeing them, comes quickly forward into the more open light where they are awaiting him.

"This is too much good fortune!" says a clear, strong voice—a voice, however, unexpected. Nora's hand tightens upon her sister's arm. She grows very pale. A sense of relief, absorbed, however, by a bitter disappointment, renders her faint.

It is not Cyril. It is Mr. Carnegie!

He had heard Sophie's voice, but not the word she used. He comes up to them radiant. It occurs to Sophie once again that he is so *good* to look at, so kindly, so reliable, so *dean*! Sophie has always stuck to it, even to the disparagement of Denis, that St. John Carnegie is the cleanest-looking man she knows.

"Oh! Mr. Carnegie? Fancy seeing *you* here," says she gaily, covering Nora's retreat—Nora, who is pale, and silent, and miserable. "We had no idea our river, magnificent as it is, had been already made a mark for tourists. After this, we shall advertise it largely, and make our fortunes."

"It is a delightful little river, in spite of your sneers," says Carnegie, shaking hands with both girls, and letting his eyes rest searchingly on Nora. "I feel I ought to explain why I am now here, admiring it. Your sister"—always looking at Nora, whose eyes are on the ground, and whose small, lovely face is looking exquisite in the growing moonlight, like a lily-bud half-opened—"was good enough to say I might come up to Dunmore any evening I liked to see—Sir Fell. She said . . . you *did* say so, did you not?" with an imperative glance at Nora, that compels her to raise her head, and give him a little, pale smile and a glance of question. "That I might come *soon*, so I have come to-night. It"—looking now full at Sophie, as if asking her to comprehend his meaning to its fullest—"was as soon as ever I could."

"It could not be too soon," returns Sophie hospitably, and as cheerfully as she can make it, with a vision of an approaching Cyril in the background. If he should come now! What future happy plans for Nora's welfare may it not spoil? Providentially Mr. Carnegie had not understood her when she cried "Cyril" in that quick, angry tone, but if Ferris should now appear, he, Mr. Carnegie, cannot fail to associate his coming with their presence here in this old wood at this late hour.

She turns her head nervously, and there, coming towards the bridge from the far side, is someone; it is useless to try to deceive herself even for a moment—(and only a moment is given)—it is Cyril.

He is here indeed, before she has time to think of what will be the best thing to say—for Nora.

Ferris has come up to them hurriedly, his overcoat is a little open, and his white shirt can be seen. He is a little breathless—evidently he had got up from dinner in a hurry, and has run the best part of the way here. He shakes hands with Sophie (who receives him coldly), and gives a casual nod to Carnegie without looking at him—his gaze is rivetted on Nora.

To find her here, and with Carnegie! Carnegie of all men! His heart, false and selfish as it is, grows hot, and a mad jealousy burns within his veins. Though half-determined to abandon her, to give up this young sweet life, so wholly given to him, he yet resents the idea of her allowing even one thought of hers to wander to another. What adds to the fury that possesses him is the knowledge that he cannot declare himself to Carnegie, whom he detests, as a suitor for Nora's hand. His own hands are too far tied for that, and a mere *word*, would be dangerous, if drifted back to Eldon Vancourt later on. Eldon, who is notoriously unforgiving even through her sprightliness, and as vindictive as she is lively. His rage now mounts even higher, as he acknowledges to himself the necessity of explaining to Carnegie the fact of his being here at this hour. It is almost imperative that Carnegie should be led afield a bit, as to his, Ferris', relations with Nora. A brilliant idea occurs to him.

"You look as if you had been running," said Sophie, innocently, if very unpleasantly.

"Yes, I was in a hurry," says Ferris calmly. "Mrs. Vancourt asked me to give your sister a message."

Nora, whose face is fortunately hidden by the dusk, lifts her eyes and looks at him; Carnegie, looking too, feels a sudden lightness of heart. After all, perhaps, there was nothing in it. If Ferris can so openly speak of Mrs. Vancourt to Nora—if he can declare himself her messenger—so altogether at her beck and call, the girl cannot be blind to the fact of his open attentions to the pretty widow.

Sophie laughs outright.

"Mrs. Vancourt has chosen a swift Mercury," says she. "And a message—whose message? One from her or from you?"

"From Mrs. Vancourt, of course," says Nora. She takes her arm out of Sophie's, and goes up to Ferris. "What can I do for Mrs. Vancourt?" says she.

Instinctively, Sophie and Carnegie turn and go towards the bridge once more, leaving the other two face to face, silent, expectant, waiting until they can be sure of privacy, to say what it is pain and grief to one of them, at all events, to *have* to say, but what would be greater pain still to hold back—as for the other, his blue eyes are black with passion.

CHAPTER XVI.

"The high-bred dames of Dublin town
 Are rich and fair,
 With wavy plume and silken gown
 And stately air ;
 Can plumes compare thy dark brown hair
 Can silks thy neck of snow,
 Or measured pace thine artless grace ?
Mo craoibhin cno,
 When harebells scarcely show thy trace,
Mo craoibhin cno."

—*Irish Ballad.*

"So this is how I find you," says he in a low tone, but one replete with rage. He pushes away the little hand she has extended to him.

"Cyril !" says she, and then stands still, smoothing unconsciously the hand he has hurt in his anger. Not that she feels the pain of it—there is a pain in her heart so greater far. "You mean——?" asks she. She has come here, miserable, distrustful, wretched in the thought that she is going to find some fault in *him*, and here, lo! the tables are turned, and it is she who is being brought before the bar. "You mean——?" asks she, as if bewildered.

"You know well what I mean," exclaims he violently. "What is that fellow doing here, at this hour?"

"What? Who?" She stops, as if unable to go on. His manner terrifies her.

"Don't overdo it, Nora !" says he with a nasty sneer. "I'll name him if you like. What brings Carnegie here? You know who I mean by Carnegie, perhaps—or shall I describe him? He has an old name, and a handsome rent roll, and——"

"Don't !" says Nora, in a low, but stirring tone. "He is here because——"

"Because you invited him?"

"No."

"By your permission, then, if you must stick to the letter of the law?"

"Hardly," says she; she looks at him with a little touch

of dignity that sits most sweetly on her, and deepens the beauty of her childish face. "I do not think you ought to subject me to this," says she. "You should not cross-examine me like this, I think, but I cannot be happy till I tell you how it was." Her voice breaks a little, but she conquers herself and goes on. "Sir Fell, it seems had asked him to come up and have a smoke with him some evening; why, I don't know, Sir Fell so seldom likes anyone—and——"

"Don't you?" interrupting with a harsh laugh, "*I do.*"

"And"—going on in her eager exculpation of herself as if not hearing, or, at all events, not heeding—"Mr. Carnegie asked me this afternoon if he might come soon, and what could I say but 'yes'?"

"What indeed, except 'no.'"

"I could not say that, Cyril. You must see that."

"I see it indeed! I"—bitterly—"feel sure you will *never* say 'no' to him."

"You are unjust—you are absurd," says the girl quickly, throwing out her hands a little. "It was Sir Fell's invitation, not mine. Had I said 'no' for ever he would—he"—doing justice in her honest soul even at this moment to Carnegie's good breeding—"he *might* have come here all the same."

"You admit that," says Ferris grimly. "So do I; I believe nothing would have kept him away from this—even though Sir Fell and his cigars (which, I allow, are excellent) had suddenly been transported to the North Pole."

"I think you ought to explain yourself," says she calmly, but with a certain tension that communicates itself to him.

"Oh! I daresay," says he; now that his first burst of anger has subsided (the anger born of wounded vanity), it has occurred to him that there may be wisdom (a hardly as yet defined wisdom) in keeping up his attitude. "Well, I shall explain easily enough. Do you think it is pleasant for me to see you encouraging the attentions of anyone? And am I so blind that I can't see that you are encouraging Carnegie? Carnegie of all men! A fellow old enough to be your father."

"Mr. Carnegie is *not* old enough to be my father," says Nora coldly, all her strength awake. "But even if he *were*, what has that got to do with it?" She throws up her proud little head and turns upon him, "What do you

mean?" says she haughtily. "How *dare* you speak of Mr. Carnegie to me in that way? How dare you accuse me of inconstancy! you—*you!* to accuse *me!*"

She stops; she draws a deep and heavy breath—one born of anguish, long suppressed!

"Have I nothing to say?" she goes on in a stifled tone. "Oh! all day long what have I endured? *You* cannot know—who is there that will ever know? But it was terrible." She draws her hand over her brow, lifting the soft tresses lying on it—and sighs! *What* a sigh.

It goes even to his apology for a heart.

"You evidently think I am in the wrong somewhere," says he sullenly. "If so, well," with a certain courage, "tell me how I am in the wrong. You speak to me as if I were the most inconstant devil alive, but you explain nothing. I suppose," with a rather uneasy assumption of indifference, "you are alluding to that walk I took with her to-day."

"I don't know what I am alluding to," says Nora feverishly. "I know only that I am too wretched to live; yes—that walk—and her look at me. I seem to see it all, over and over again. Her eyes, they seem to mock me, to deride me, but that is not all——"

"Good Heavens! I must be a sinner above all the Galileans," says he with an attempt at gaiety, but a darkening brow. "What is the last heinous crime?"

"How could you have said *that* to them," cries she, the culminating point reached at last. "How *could* you? Sophie—Sophie, who always distrusts you—what could *she* have thought. 'A message from Mrs. Vancourt!' Oh! could you not have invented some other excuse—*any* excuse but that!"

The extreme agony of her young voice for once dulls his fertile brain; no explanation comes to his parted lips. He looks at her.

"It *hurts* me," says she, pressing her little hands against her bosom as if striving to crush down some actual physical pain that lies there. "I can't bear it! Why—why did you make them think that *she* sent you on her errands?—an errand from her to *me!* Why did you make them believe you were such—friends with her? How am I to bear what Sophie will think—will say?"

"I had to make some explanation," says he gloomily.

"But why? There was only Sophie—Sophie, who has

imagined the truth for so long, and yet who has her doubts of you——”

“There was Carnegie also, you must remember. He would be only too glad to put a spoke in my wheel. Do you think I can’t see how it is with him? Look here,” almost savagely, “you speak of Sophie! You seem to blame me about the fact of our engagement being kept secret. Do you want to make it public?”

“Oh, no, no!” she shrinks a little, and puts up her hands as if to ward off something. “I want to tell nobody except—except only Sophie. It—it is dreadful about Sophie! She never *says* anything, but I know she is always thinking things about you that cut me to the heart.”

“She thinks me dishonourable?”

“Yes, I am afraid so,” drooping her perfect head. “But that is only because she doesn’t understand about us. Cyril—I *must* tell Sophie. I cannot go through much more of it. I cannot be silent any longer when she accuses you of—of——”

She hesitates; it is terrible to her to put the truth into words, though as yet she is far from knowing what the truth really is.

“Well, tell her,” says Ferris sullenly. “After all, why should it be concealed? It was more for your sake than for mine that I ever thought of being silent about our engagement.”

“For mine?”

“Certainly, for yours. Do you think Sir Fell would encourage a poor beggar like me as a suitor for one of his step-daughters? I think he has proved to both our satisfactions that he would not. It was for your sake, therefore, I desired silence. Though, for myself, it was necessary too. I——” he hesitates, “have some expectations!”

“You?” Her tone is one of amazement, not of hope. She had never heard either from him or others that he had expectations from any quarter.

“Is that so strange a thing? Yes. I have some expectations. Very small, but every grain is something to” —bitterly—“a starving man.” If his mind has invented this lie through his intimacy with Mrs. Vancourt, and his expectations from an alliance with her, he himself is hardly aware of it, and yet—the whole thing is a lie. He has no expectations. He is merely anxious at this moment to

carry his point—to conceal his engagement with Nora as long as possible. The engagement has already begun to be a sort of nightmare, yet he would not do away with it—with her—the dearest possession of his selfish heart.

"However," says he, "do as you will. Though my own prospects may be ruined by an open declaration of our engagement, I have, of course, no right to consider them, when your happiness is in question."

"Cyril!"

"Well, I have told you how it is—that my people all think I ought to marry some one with money."

"Your people!"

"Oh, I *have* some people," says he, with a dull sort of laugh. "You speak as if you thought I had grown, like Topsy."

"I was only thinking that you had never mentioned them to me," says she, smiling. "At least, of course, I know of Lady Saggartmore, and the Stewarts and others, but of none to whom you owed allegiance or from whom anything was to be gained. I," gently, "did not mean to be rude."

"Rude! *You* rude!" says he. His tone is impulsive—it does her all justice, but he checks it: "You know what I think of you, Nora," says he in a more measured manner. "All I want you to understand is, that if my people knew me to be engaged to the best, the sweetest girl on earth, as," with fine presence of mind and a charming smile—"I *am*—they would still resent it, if you had no money."

"I see," says Nora slowly. She pauses. A sense of indignity has fallen upon her. To be rejected, refused, disdained by everyone, even by these unknown people, is bitter to her, the more especially, perhaps, because they are *his* people. And then a fresh thought comes to her! A dreadful thought! Her pause grows prolonged, so long indeed, as to render Ferris uncomfortable. What is she thinking about? He knows at last. "Mrs. Vancourt has money," says she, in a curious tone, and coldly.

"Has she?" It is too dark for her to see the vivid colour that dyes his face. He thanks—if not Heaven—at all events, some power for this blackness that covers him. His tone, however, is all it ought to be. "What has Mrs. Vancourt to do with this discussion?"

"Nothing, I hope," says the girl coldly still—and then

—"It is only this," says she, raising her dark expressive eyes to his. "If you want to marry Mrs. Vancourt, marry her! and at once—do you hear?—*at once!* Marry her," throwing off all disguise now, and letting the expression in her blue eyes grow passionate—"before," wildly, "*you break my heart!*"

"Nora, take care," says he in a low tone, glancing towards the bridge where Sophie and Carnegie are standing. His first thought, indeed, is for them, and whether they could possibly have heard her clear, soft tones, made clearer by the passion, the despair, that rings through them. "What madness to talk like that!" says he. "How selfish you are." (*He*, to talk of selfishness!) "You are always bringing your heart into your conversation, as though there were no heart on earth but yours. Have I no heart? Do I not suffer? Have I no miserable thoughts—or fancies? I tell you I am filled with them."

"And I have only one!" says she. She is trembling. Her whole sweet body feels cold as ice. "Kill it for me." She turns to him, and holds out her hands. "Say she is nothing to you," cries she softly, but vehemently. "Say it, Cyril. Say it!"

"Less than nothing," declares he promptly. It is quite a relief to him to be able to speak the truth at last; yet there are *arrière pensées* that make the truth a lie and cause him to curse himself for the saying of it.

"Oh!" cries she, and breaks into a little low, half-wild, and wholly happy laugh. "If that is so, and I have it from your own lips, nothing—nothing—*nothing* can matter!"

"Nothing!" repeats he stonily.

"And I may tell Sophie?" says she, laughing still, and looking at him with eyes filled full of tears. Heaven alone knows the meaning of those tears—whether born of joy, or bred of sorrow.

"You still persist about that?" asks he restively.

"It is for *you*," says she, nodding her head gaily. "To make her understand the *dearness* of you. And she will be silent, quite silent, if I tell her. Sophie is true as steel. One could depend their life upon her. Cyril, *darling!* say I may tell her."

"You are sure she is safe?" says he, unable to resist the pleading of the one pure love he knows, yet despising himself for his weakness the while.

"Oh, as sure as I am of——" she pauses, and laughs up at him, with a perfect trust, and love, and joy," of your love for me."

There is silence for a second, filled still by her pretty, happy laugh, and then——

"Nora! Nora!" cries he. He has taken her hands, he is pressing them with an almost painful force between his own. To the poor child this vehemence seems but an outpouring of his love for her; then the strain getting too great, he drops her little clinging fingers and makes a movement as if to depart.

"I must go, now," says he huskily. "No. I cannot stay any longer. Good-night, good-night, my beloved!" There is real passion—real love in his voice, weak love made stronger by remorse! He pauses. He risks the chance that the two on the bridge yonder may see him (a small risk certainly), and taking one of her hands, again presses his lips to it.

"To-morrow?" whispers she, as a little question. He generally manages to see her every day one time or another.

"Not to-morrow! I have an arrangement for to-morrow with—I—Lady Saggartmore wants me to-morrow!"

Another lie! He presses her hand again, and leaves her.

Walking past the bridge he calls "Good-night!" cheerily to the two upon it, and presently the growing darkness swallows him up.

"Let us go back to Nora," says Sophie to Carnegie.

CHAPTER XVII.

"Youth must with time decay,
 Eileen Aroon!
 Beauty must fade away,
 Eileen Aroon!
 Castles are sacked in war,
 Chieftains are scattered far,
 Truth is a fixed star,
 Eileen Aroon!"

"WELL?" calls out Sophie cheerily, as they draw near to Nora. "I hope you were able to be of some use to Mrs. Vancourt." Her cheerfulness is somewhat affected, and it is a very anxious glance she casts at Nora as she comes up to her, but it has seemed to Sophie that it is her imperative

duty to keep Nora's mad infatuation for "that worthless Cyril" a secret from everyone, and especially (though she has scarcely yet defined this thought) from Mr. Carnegie.

It is on the tip of Nora's tongue to cry aloud, "There was *no* message!" but she checks herself in time. She would have given anything to be able to say this to Sophie, to kill at once the contemptuous feeling towards Cyril she knows to be in her sister's breast, but to say it before another—before Carnegie—is impossible. She turns at once to the latter, ignoring Sophie's question.

"I have kept you waiting," says she. "I am so sorry. And you want to see Sir Fell. Come, let us hurry now, and make up for lost time."

"Do not hurry on my account," says Carnegie, in his pleasantest tone. "The night is glorious, and—there is no lost time."

"A compliment to you, Sophie," says Nora smiling. She is longing to be in her own room, to think, to look into her own heart and find out whether she is glad or sorry. Just now her mind is in a turmoil. There is one thought, however, that uprises, filling her with gladness—though he had hurt and in a sense betrayed her by that suggestion of his having been sent to her to-night by Mrs. Vancourt—on Mrs. Vancourt's business—but he had been *jealous*! Oh, dear! glad certainty! He had hated the thought that Mr. Carnegie was there with her. Yes. He does love her, and her alone!

She falls into silence and walks on, with her eyes gazing straight before her, yet seeing nothing—not even the soft beauty of the growing night, the deepening moon, the swaying shadows, and the music behind them where

"In the gloamin' o' the wood
The throstle whistled sweet."

Silently she walks along, her heart very full. No doubt her extreme preoccupation would have been even more noticeable had not Sophie rushed into the breach; Sophie, whose whole desire is still to shield her. She feels impatient with Nora, and even a little angry, but then she is Nora! To prevent Mr. Carnegie from noticing the girl's taciturnity, she enters at once into an animated discussion with him on all things in heaven and earth.

Sophie as a talker (I cannot say a converser) is unrivalled.

She stands alone! She is the first thing to be heard in the morning, the last at night. From morn to dewy eve her tongue holds forth. In her own line she is splendid—she is untiring.

Night alone is the one thing, (when providentially it arrives,) that silences her. Though, indeed, night itself would be of little use in that direction, were it not for the fact that at eleven o'clock sharp everyone at Dunmore goes to bed, and, therefore, no one is left to listen to her. Then, perforce, she sleeps—only to rise on the morrow as full of words as though she had been muzzled for a fortnight.

Just now, having been eloquent over the afternoon spent at Castle Saggart, she pauses to take breath—a pause that gives Mr. Carnegie a chance of putting in a word.

“Shall I see you at the Kinsellas’ on Thursday?” asks he. His eyes are fixed on Nora. Will she never speak? Of what is she thinking?

“I think so,” says Sophie. “Sir Fell has at last given us permission to go there.”

“At last?” He is still looking at Nora. How beautiful she is in the faint moonlight. How charming is her air, walking slowly thus, with head uplifted, and that strange far-off look in her eyes.

“O, tell me less, or tell me more,
Sweet eyes with mystery at the core!”

How slender, how exquisite are the lines of her childish figure. There is an unmistakable touch of race about her—of old family, that goes prettily, if curiously, with her fragility, and gives her a certain *cachet*. Whilst listening to Sophie’s chatter he is telling himself that he has never in all his life seen anyone the least bit like Nora. He has begun to think of her as “Nora.”

“Well, you see,” says Sophie, “the Kinsellas! We have never been allowed to go there before. They,” she laughs with some embarrassment, “they are not like us. Not one of us at all.”

“No. One can see that!”

“Though I like them,” says Sophie, quickly, loyally. “I think old Mr. Kinsella the dearest old man in the world; and so funny. Oh! how he makes me laugh.” She laughs gaily as she speaks. “And if his father *did* keep a shop long ages ago in this very town, and if his son helped him,

I don't see a bit why we should not know them now—now,” candidly, “when he is very rich, and gives such delightful parties.”

“So Peter's grandfather kept a shop,” says Mr. Carnegie, laughing too. “Poor Peter! That must be a sorry recollection for him.”

“Oh! Peter. He *is* so silly!” says Sophie. “He does nothing, from morning till night, but talk of his titled acquaintances and propose to Nora!”

“What?” Mr. Carnegie stares.

“Eh?” says Nora, who has heard her name mentioned.

“I am just telling Mr. Carnegie about Peter Kinsella,” says Sophie, who is now laughing immoderately. “Don't deny it, Nolly, you know you can't. He *does* ask you to marry him every time he sees you, doesn't he?”

“Sophie,” says Nora, and then—catching the infection of Nora's laughter, which indeed is hard to resist, and happy with this fresh belief in Cyril's love for her, warm within her heart—she, too, begins to laugh, lightly, happily.

Carnegie is still staring at her, and something in his expression wakes a sense of mischief in her. She leans towards him.

“*Sometimes* he forgets!” she says. “Sometimes he lacks opportunity! But, as a rule, I can depend upon him. To-day he had no chance—but I am sure he will make up for that on Thursday by proposing to me *twice*!”

Her laughter is a revelation to Carnegie. It rings, sweet and clear, like the rushing of a merry stream. It is quick with music—music from the heart. He had not thought she could have laughed like that. She had always seemed to him a little inclined to melancholy—he has seen her, however, very seldom, and generally when Ferris was on the spot; the latter's love for her had not been for her good, or for her happiness. It had had from the very first a depressing influence upon her. It meant a constant strain—an expectation of evil—a joy tinged with terror—a delight destroyed by distrust.

It occurs to Carnegie now, that nature had meant her to be intensely happy. The life given to her had been richer, freer, than is given to most; the life of some wild, joyous thing—a bird, perhaps! But that life had been trapped—stilled! By whom? Carnegie's thoughts fly at once to Sir Fell, to the step-father! Is it possible that he is unkind to

these two children? Oh! to be able to take Nora away from all things hurtful—saddening?

His heart gives a wild bound! Perhaps until this moment he had not understood how it is with him.

"You look surprised," says Nora, with a touch of coquetry.

"Well—I am," returns he promptly, "at his presumption. And so his father kept a shop?"

"Long years ago," says Nora airily. "That rather adds to Peter's charms I think, myself."

"There isn't a doubt about it," says Sophie, who cannot keep silence any longer. "And his grandpapa too!"

"He's not so *very* bad, you see," says Nora, who seems in wild spirits—a sort of reaction, perhaps. "He *had* a grandfather!"

"I'll tell you who knows more than anyone about them," says Sophie. "Daddledy. You know old Daddledy—don't you?"

"I think so. An old servant of yours?"

"Yes. He knows you at all events—and the Kinsellas also. Like all the Irish peasants, Daddledy is an aristocrat to his finger tips. He loathes anything but the very *crème de la crème*. A *parvenu* is an abomination in his sight—a *nouveau riche* an offence! He hates the Kinsellas, needless to say."

"So like that class," says Carnegie; "they pretend to despise the 'gentry,' as they call them, yet in their souls they cleave to them. Upon no one have they less mercy than upon the man who rises from their own ranks, and presumes, through power of money, to lord it over them. Him they detest and despise. Truly they are a strange nation! Well—in spite of the shop—I confess, I like old Kinsella."

"So do I," says Nora. "If he kept twenty shops, I should still love old Mr. Kinsella."

"Happy old man!" says Carnegie; he laughs as he says it, but there is considerable earnestness in his manner. Earnestness completely thrown away!

"Oh! twenty shops! That would clear the horizon at once," says Sophie. "The man who owns twenty shops would be adored by everyone."

"Well, I suppose Mr. Kinsella must have had twenty in America," says Nora; "or else he could not have come

home so rich as he is. Though, I believe, it wasn't shops there, it was a mine."

"He struck ile, one way or another, at all events," says Sophie, "and came back to Saggart with the proceeds—bought up Carmeen (they have rechristened it 'The Abbey'), and have settled down almost within view of the grandfather's shop!"

"They say murderers always revisit the scene of their crime," says Carnegie.

"I don't think Mr. Kinsella minds much about the shop," says Sophie. "But Peter! It is like the proverbial red rag to Peter! When first he came back he couldn't be got to remember anything about the town. There is a grocery place there called Pim's; and somebody asked Peter on his return if he dealt at Pim's. Peter looked at him. 'And where is Pim's?' asked he."

"Never mind. I like Peter too," says Nora.

"So you ought. As I have hinted—you would be the most ungrateful girl alive if you didn't."

"Do all your sister's suitors fare badly at her hands?" asks Carnegie lightly; apparently indifferently. He is smiling, but he is watching Nora.

"Not all," says Sophie gaily. "But as a rule she is hard-hearted."

Carnegie pauses, as if he would have asked another question, but either his courage fails him, or prudence suggests to him that it will be unwise to go further. He must have time. He would have liked to continue the idle conversation, but hesitates to do so. She might hear something in his tone that would startle her—compel her to understand—and after all, is he quite sure of himself yet? *Does* he love her?—What had her sister meant by that half-laughing answer? "Not all!" Who was the exception? Or was there an exception? And that other word, "As a rule!" Did she mean anything—or nothing? Was it a mere *façon de parler*?

At this moment they come to a little rustic gate that leads from the lawn to the garden; the lights from the house are falling across the flower beds, making bright streaks of yellow light across the darkness.

As Carnegie bends over the gate, Nora catches Sophie's hand.

"If Sir Fell hears of Cyril——"

There is no time to say more. The gate is open, and Mr. Carnegie is waiting for them to pass through. Sophie presses her hand. Nora, so easily uplifted, so readily depressed, is once again silent—drawn back into herself.

They are now in the garden, and a crimson light from the windows of the library reaches almost to their feet. In this hot weather the shutters are seldom closed and often the windows are left wide open.

"Oh! here we are," says Sophie, speaking in a suppressed tone. "If you will go up those steps, Mr. Carnegie, and in at that window, you will find Sir Fell. He will be delighted——"

"And you?"

"We shall go to our own room," says Sophie demurely. "We are both sorry, aren't we, Nora? but I'm afraid you won't see us again to-night. Sir Fell," even more demurely, "does not like to have his evenings disturbed."

"Disturbed!" Carnegie's mind rather rages round Sir Fell. Old Goth! His evenings "*disturbed*" by these charming children. "Perhaps at that rate, *I* had better not go in," says he.

"Oh, no! It is only we who disturb him," says Nora blandly.

"Is that so?" says Carnegie gravely. He would have liked to say a great many things, but etiquette forbids him. "I am fortunate then in having met you by chance, as I did."

"The merest chance," says Sophie. She holds out to him her hand. "Good-night," says she.

"Good-night."

"And Mr. Carnegie," begins Sophie, a little shamefacedly. But Mr. Carnegie is not listening to her. He has Nora's hand in his now, and is looking down into the small, pale, beautiful little face, with strange, new thoughts within his mind.

"Mr. Carnegie," says Sophie again, as loudly as she can, with the fear of being heard behind those library blinds always before her. "I want to ask you something——"

"Anything! To half my kingdom," says he.

"Well—if you don't mind. We—I—— That is," desperately, "I wish you wouldn't tell Sir Fell that we were out so late. He is very particular about little things—and——"

She is quite priding herself on getting on so well, when suddenly Nora spoils it all.

"Don't tell him we met Cyril Ferris," says she, looking entreatingly into his eyes. "He hates Cyril."

"Oh! I see," says Mr. Carnegie. His glance is searching, with an almost passionate anxiety, the fair little face looking up at him.

"He hates every one," says Sophie hurriedly. "Every young man, any way. You won't believe it, perhaps," says poor Sophie, betraying her own little secret in her anxiety to hide her sister's—"but he even hates *Denis*!"

"He must be hard to please," says Mr. Carnegie, with sympathy. "Of course I shall say nothing. I am glad, indeed, you told me—that you have so far let me consider myself a friend."

"Oh! thank you," says Sophie gratefully. Indeed both girls bid him good-night again with much warmth, and it is with a happy remembrance of Nora's friendly close little pressure of his hand—a remembrance that lasts him for many days—that he runs up the steps to Sir Fell's library window.

As for the girls, they pick up the skirts of their gowns, and, keeping carefully on the grass, make a run for the side door that will let them into the house.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"Ah! my heart is sore with sighing,
Sighing for the May,
Sighing for their sure returning,
When the Summer beams are burning.
Hopes and flowers that, dead or dying,
All the Winter lay.
Ah! my heart is sore with sighing,
Sighing for the May."

THE Kinsellas, father and son, are unique. In their own way, at all events. Sophie's account of them, acquired through constant conversations with Daddledy, amidst the delights of gardening, is accurate enough. That fatal shop can still be pointed out in Saggart, though fifty years have gone by since the name of Kinsella was on its door. But what is time in the country?—a mere nothing, made alone for slaves! There is always a great-grandfather or two to stir up the youthful memories, and compel them to recol-

lect this, that, and the other thing that would be so much better forgotten—the year when Darby Doolan swung on the gallows tree—the month when Nance Molloy murdered the baby that should never have been born—the day when my lord, in the big house above there, turned his own son out of doors, for daring to marry against his will said some, for forgery said others . . . All such dates are writ large upon the memories of those oldest inhabitants.

The Kinsellas, born of the people, might have known they could not escape the tongue of scandal, yet old Kinsella having grown rich beyond all belief in Philadelphia, had decided upon defying public comment, and, fired, perhaps, besides with a desire to see the old place before death made his own of him, had brought back to Saggart his large fortune—a handsome presence—a heart as simple as a child's—a brogue that, in spite of all those years, you could hang your hat on—and his son.

Peter Kinsella is a joy in himself. A joy at times too great—for his acquaintances. He is a tall man—as tall as his old father, but considerably slimmer, with a tremendous air—"the grand air"—*he* calls it—and a presence!

There must have been a pause in the amassing of the pile—or, perhaps, on the completion of the pile—it was always thought of by Peter's friends with a capital "P"—when old Kinsella had thought it desirable to send his son abroad before bringing him back to Saggart. The foreign idea, when shunted on to old Kinsella, seems foreign indeed, yet the old man had his own longings for grandeur, and for introductions into the "upper ten" (as he *would* call it, to his son's discomfiture), and doubtless thought a continental tour would add another lustre to Peter, who, in his opinion, however, was quite polished enough.

He had despatched Peter from New York to Paris three months before he himself started for the South of Ireland. There the two re-met, and his own father, it may be safely said, scarcely knew Peter! He had, indeed, made good use of his time! He had left New York, an Irishman—a polished one according to his father!—he arrived in Saggart a Frenchman!

It was so awfully clever of him, people said to old Kinsella—(they never laughed when they said it to *him*)—and of course it *was* awfully clever to be able to forget

your own language in three months, and learn to speak another.

The *other* was the queerest language ever yet heard! It was the admiration of the lower classes in Saggart—the dismay of the higher. Lord Saggartmore, after deep research, declared that he spoke French—

“ Full, fair, and fetisly,
After the school of Stratford attë Bow.”

His wife said he was very rude.

This phrase lasted but a little while, however. Peter was equal to all emergencies, to all changes of fashion. Running up to town from Saggart, he put in a season there (his wealth giving him a certain status, and getting him into a couple of decent clubs), and returning to Ireland, about a month ago, he has brought back with him many innovations.

If he had learned French in three months, it can hardly be considered remarkable that he should learn to be merely fashionable in one. Peter had spent but one month in London last year, yet it had done wonders for him! He had learned how to shake hands for one thing. This need not be sneered at—it is a difficult acquirement indeed, as all its votaries allow, and Peter as a fact had out-Heroded his Herods. *They* could lift their elbows to a level with their ears. Peter, proud boast! could raise *his* to a level with his head!

He had learned more than how to shake hands, however! He had learned how to mutilate his English in the proper way. He could, indeed, drop his final g's as successfully as though he had been in the heart of Society for the past four years! People—*nice* people, I mean—quite wondered at his proficiency in this art. It had taken *them* quite a long time to be so vulgar—it had taken Peter no time at all! And he did it in the most well-bred manner!

He had *not*, however, learned to play the banjo. This was felt to be a sad drawback. But Nature, who had been so beneficent to Peter in many ways—who had, indeed, according to his own and his father's opinion, made him so much a sort of “curled darling” amongst his associates (it took, it must be confessed, a good deal of methylated spirit, and a strong curling tongs to produce the effect)—had forgotten to endow him with a soul for

music. 'Nature at times, we all know, is singularly remiss !

Yet why be unkind to Nature in this instance? Why rebuke her? No doubt a sense of justice forbade her to give *all* things to Peter Kinsella !

* * * * *

"Oh ! what a lovely day !" cries Sophie, flinging open her bedroom window and gazing down into the scented garden beneath, from whence a thousand delicate perfumes uprise to meet her. "Peter is fortunate !"

She is speaking to Nora, who has come from her own room into this—filled with a desire to lay bare her heart to Sophie. All night long she has lain awake dwelling on the hard-wrung permission from Cyril to tell Sophie of her engagement to him. She could have told her about it that past night (now four days old), but some strange feeling held her dumb—but now—now before she shall meet him and—and—Mrs. Vancourt again together—she feels as if she *must* tell Sophie how it is with her and him.

Her heart is sinking within her. How—if when she tells Sophie of the fact that he has asked her to marry him, he will still show himself attentive to Mrs. Vancourt at Mr. Kinsella's this afternoon? And yet, she must speak. Her face is pale, her courage dies within her, the very beauty of the day she shrinks from, as though it were a bright thing created to show the deadly sombreness of her own heart.

"Some people are always fortunate," says she, in a depressed tone, *à propos* of Sophie's last remark.

"That's nonsense !" says Sophie, briskly. "Nobody is ever anything always—not even *unfortunate* ! Where are your thoughts running now? To Cyril?"

"Yes," in a low tone.

"Well ! I've told you often enough," says Sophie, vehemently, breaking into a confession that was on her sister's lips, "that that way madness lies ! For goodness' sake, Nolly, why do you waste your time over a man who is charming to you at one o'clock, delightful to another at two, and, positively, *all things* to someone else at three?"

"You think I am no more to him than another," says Nora, turning to her with a face grown very pale.

"I think he is beneath notice," returns Sophie promptly.

"You mean——" She stops, choked with emotion.

"Look here, Noll. You'll *hate* me before you are done with him, but I *will* say what I think, if only for your salvation. What I mean is, that a man who has paid you so much attention for months, should certainly have asked you to marry him before this."

"You are right," says Nora.

"Well,"—throwing out her hands—"There! you acknowledge it!"

"And he is right too. He *has* asked me to marry him!"

"Oh! Nora! Yesterday?"

"No. No—no." She looks at her sister, and casts herself suddenly into a big armchair, that seems to swallow up her tiny form—"Months ago!"

"Months ago!" Sophie stares at her. There is astonishment first, and now a growing reproach within her kind hazel eyes—"Months! and you never told me?"

"Oh! that was horrid of me. I *know* how horrid it was!" cries Nora, springing out of the chair and throwing her arms round Sophie. "But—if you only knew! If you had been me——"

"I should have told you——"

"No. No, you would not. Not if the one you loved told you to be silent."

"But *why* be silent?"

"He could not bear to think he was injuring me by proclaiming our engagement, when he knew he could not marry on his slender income. You know, Sophie, it is small—very small——"

"His income? Yes. But when is it to be bigger?"

"I don't know! Some time. Oh, Sophie, don't talk to me, don't look at me like that. I have been so longing to tell you all these months—You don't know *how* I have suffered because I could not tell you——"

"He forbid you?"

"Well—not that—only he was afraid, as I have said, that it might destroy my chance of marrying a richer man. As if"—scornfully—"I should *ever* marry any one but him! But that last night down by the bridge I told him I should tell you—you only. You understand that, Sophie," with a little frightened tightening of her arms round her sister. "You *only*!"

"Oh! I understand," says Sophie. "Tell him he need not be afraid of me!" There is a touch of impatience—of

contempt—in her voice that goes to Nora's heart. Slowly her arms drop from round her sister. She moves back. Her eyes sink to the ground.

"You misjudge him still," she says. There is terrible disappointment in her whole air. Has she wrung from him a permission to make Sophie a confidante in their secret, only to find the confidante cold, scornful—distrustful.

"No ; now, Nolly, darling ! you must not take it in that way," cries Sophie, to whose soul that little disconsolate look has gone. "I am more glad than I can say that he has spoken to you ; it is only that I cannot bear the thought of you—*you*, who are—Well !—you know what I think of you, Noll, that you are the dearest and loveliest thing on earth. And, to think that you should be engaged *secretly*, is hateful to me. I should think the man whom you loved ought to be glad to proclaim the joyful fact from the house-tops !"

"But it is for *my* sake," says Nora.

"Yes—yes."

There is silence for a little time, and then :

"Why did you say he liked one this hour and one the next ?" asks she in a low voice.

"You must remember I did not know he had asked you to marry him then."

"Still," steadfastly—her large eyes bent on her sister's face—"you mean someone. Was it Mrs. Vancourt ?"

"He certainly does seem very attentive to her—doesn't he now, darling ?" asks Sophie miserably. "And I'm sure I don't know how he can be ! Such an overdressed, stagey, painted little creature I never saw."

"She is pretty," says Nora ; her tone is, however, a question. She looks at Sophie with expectant hope in her eyes.

"Not she," says Sophie, who is really one of the most *comfortable* girls in the world. "Little Doll ! But a dangerous doll, mind you, Nora. You must keep your eye on her."

"But why ?" asks Nora, throwing up her head—there is battle in the lovely face. Does she *still* distrust him ?

"Well. For many reasons. For one, because she always keeps her eye on you."

"You think ?" asks Nora, brightening.

"That she is jealous of you ? It would be a blind bat indeed that couldn't see that. I tell you what, Noll, she'll

do you a bad turn when she can. I do hate that little woman, with her airs and her graces and her eyes! What eyes she makes! And at *every* man. She was making herself delightful to Denis the other day. Ha! Ha! You should have seen her face when he got up and came over to me."

A deeper shadow falls into poor Nora's eyes. If she had been making herself charming to Cyril, would he have got up and come to *her*!

"I detest her," says Sophie, who has not known about the little stab she had so unconsciously given—that indeed she would have died rather than give. "Her affectations are sickening. *She* to pretend to be in delicate health! She who can walk miles when it suits her, and has the appetite of a schoolboy! Yet the way she lies about on sofas and couches, or anything else that comes handy, makes me wild. Eusebius says she ought to be given a coffin on her next birthday. She is so fond of lounging!"

Nora laughs a little at this, but somewhat joylessly. She walks to the window and back again, and then, as though forcing herself to say something that is hateful to her:

"She is very rich, Sophie!"

"And very vulgar," returns Sophie promptly. "She really knows nothing! I could hardly keep from bad words, the other day, when she was telling a lot of people about her 'place in Surrey,' and about her 'lady's maid.' Lady's maid! Just consider! And she calls Mr. Carnegie, Carneggie. Oh! I assure you, she is a perfect horror!"

"It doesn't matter *how* horrible one is, if one is rich," says Nora, sighing. "I wish I were!"

"And then you would marry Cyril?"

"Yes. But it is so far off before I can even get that paltry five thousand pounds. That would be a help to us, he says, small though it is. He couldn't bear to see me in poverty—and really on the whole, Sophie," telling this little lie most meekly, "I should not like to be very poor either."

"What are we now?" asks Sophie.

"Yes. That is it—" feverishly. "We are so unhappy now, that I should fear to take a step that would make us unhappy for ever. No. We shall wait. But what a power money is, Sophie," beginning to walk up and down the room. "It makes Mrs. Vancourt a power and Miss Baxter a——"

"Beauty!" supplements Sophie. "I say Nora, we had better be respectful to *her*. She is going to be our step-mother beyond a doubt. The only reason for our being allowed to go to the Kinsella's to-day, is that Sir Fell wishes to meet Miss Baxter. She is to be there, I know."

"Yes. And Lady Saggartmore and Lady Ballybrig, and everybody."

"The Kinsellas are looking up," says Sophie laughing. "Perhaps after all you had better reconsider your refusal of Peter!"

* * * * *

The drawing-rooms at the Abbey are quite full as the two Carew girls with Sir Fell enter them. A tall old man, with a large, handsome face, and a figure upright and splendid, advances to meet them.

"Here you are, girls. Here you are!" cries he heartily, giving one hand to Nora and one to Sophie; over their heads he nods at Sir Fell, who is frowning. "So good of you, sir, to bring them. Come on, me dears! There's lashins o' fun inside!"

He draws the two girls with him, still holding their hands, right up the long, long room, brilliant with gold and embroidery—to where some of their own friends are standing, Denis Butler for one, and the Stammers, and Eusebius Brush—Eusebius' mother is providentially on the tennis ground outside, held there by an absorbing determination to see how Mrs. Vancourt is conducting herself with Cyril Ferris.

Eusebius welcomes the girls with effusion.

"An oasis in the wilderness," says he, laying hands on Sophie. "*Now* I can talk."

"But of whom?"

"Why should it be supposed that it is a 'who'?"

"Oh, *I* know you," says Sophie, who, feeling Denis at her side, is happy. "Come, give me the name of your latest victim."

"Well, Nora, if you must know," says he, though it was not Nora he had in his mind. "See how tired she looks—how pale; I don't believe she is listening to one word of Peter's harangue."

"I daresay she is fearing another proposal," says Sophie gaily, but she casts an anxious glance at Nora for all that.

Nora is standing conversing with Peter Kinsella. Peter

is as tall as his father, as well made, but alas ! there the resemblance ends ; Peter is as ugly as his father is handsome. But if Peter's face fails in beauty, Peter's clothes do not. "*They* make up for all deficiencies ! Peter in his attire doth show his wit !" He is indeed splendidly apparelled. He is bending over Nora with an open adoration, looking at her intently, whilst she—is looking at the doorway !

Always there is a little tension about her when in a room where Ferris is not present, but may be momentarily expected ; there is the swift glance towards the door—the start at the sudden entrance of anyone—the sudden sharp disappointment when it is not *the* one—and for ever the look in the beautiful face as if listening, expecting—hoping. All fatal signs !

At this moment old Kinsella bustles up to his son. He had been all the morning consumed with pride at the thought that to-day he is to receive Lord and Lady Saggartmore and their friends for the first time, but now a doubt of their coming has entered into his mind.

"They're late, they're late !" says he.

"You must hurry no man's cattle !" says Peter, throwing out his arms and hands theatrically. "They're comin'—depend upon it, they're comin'. What do *you* say, Miss Carew ?"

"Yes. They will be here very soon, I think," says Nora, smiling kindly at old Kinsella. "Lady Saggartmore told me she would be here by half-past four."

"But it's past that now. It's nearly five !" says old Kinsella. "And there's something tells me she won't come at all."

"She will, indeed," says Nora with conviction.

"Well, *you* know her, me dear, an' I don't. That makes all the differ," says Mr. Kinsella, with quite a noble candour in these pretentious times.

"Difference, Dad ! Ha—ha !" says Peter with a view to hiding his father's educational deficiencies—his latest *lapsus linguæ*. "I must say, Dad, you do sometimes make havoc of your adjectives."

Perhaps poor Peter had been alluding to his father's substantives—no one, however, except Eusebius and Denis Butler take any notice of his speech—they, I regret to say, give way to mirth, of a subdued, but distinct kind.

"Hark! what is that?" exclaims Peter, bending forward as if listening. The wheels of the desired chariot can now indeed be heard grinding upon the gravel outside. "'Tis she—'tis she herself'" quotes Peter, with a beaming smile all round, delighted with his little apt quotation.

"Yes. She's arrivin'!" says Eusebius—but nobody I am glad to record takes any notice of this pleasantry, least of all Peter! Perhaps he had not understood it.

CHAPTER XIX.

"My purse holds no red gold, no coin of silver white,
No herds are mine to drive through the long twilight,
But the pretty girl that would take me, all bare though I be, and lone,
O, I'd take her with me kindly to the county Tyrone!"

—*Old Ballad.*

"Look here. Look here!" cries old Kinsella excitedly. "Before her ladyship comes in, ye know, I want to learn something. See this!" dragging out from one of his capacious pockets a large card—evidently an invitation card. "What's the meaning of this, eh? Miss Carew, me dear, you will know."

"Yes," says Nora, puzzled. "It is from Lady Saggartmore. It is for her dance."

"Well, I know that," says old Kinsella, placing his spectacles carefully on his nose and beginning to re-read the card. "It came only just now, and I hadn't a second to ask Peter about it. Peter knows everything," with a proud glance at and a belief in Peter, that goes to Nora's gentle heart. "And now Peter," looking round, "has gone out to receive her ladyship. First time under my roof, ye know—great honour, me dear Miss Carew, I don't deny that—indeed on the contrary I acknowledge it. But it isn't the invitation itself, me dear, that's puzzling me, it's them letters in the corner! What can they mean, at all at all? I've thought it out a good bit—but I can't imagine what they mean—see here now, Mr. Butler, these big capitals in the corner. R. S. V. P. What do they mean, eh? Polkas an' jigs, maybe, put into the polite French language to tell us what to expect at the ball. Peter tells me the French is wonderfully tasty in their ways. Come now, give me a hint, there's a good boy—'twould be dreadful if I couldn't answer her back like!"

"Why! don't you know?" says Eusebius mildly. "'Rose Saggartmore, Vice-President.' She's President of the Primrose League, you know. Quite simple," says Eusebius, spreading his huge hands abroad.

"Faith, it's simple, as ye say!" says Mr. Kinsella. "Thank ye sir, I'm obliged to ye. It would never have done to meet her ladyship without knowing the meaning of her own card. An' 'pon me conscience, here she is——"

He moves forward to meet Lady Saggartmore, who, with a friend of hers, Lady Ballybrig, has now entered the room. The Kinsellas are an everlasting joke to Lady Saggartmore, but mixed with her amusement is a strong sense of the worth of this handsome old man, who now stands receiving her with a warmth, a delight, a courtesy, that should go to any heart, even less good-natured than hers.

"Saggartmore is so sorry he couldn't come," says she, pressing old Kinsella's hand. "But he had to go to Cork on business; something connected with his tenants. Nothing but business would have kept him away to-day, Mr. Kinsella."

"Since he sent me *you*, ma'am, I forgive him," says old Kinsella, with a delightful smile. "Though his loss is great."

"And this is Lady Ballybrig," says Lady Saggartmore, who has put on her most courteous air for this old man, and is evidently bent on treating him to her very sweetest ways. "As she was staying with me, I ventured to bring her with me. You know her I think?"

"Mr. Kinsella and I are old friends," says Lady Ballybrig, smiling at Kinsella, "he has rented a good deal of land on the Ballybrig property."

"And true friends I hope, my lady?" says he, bowing over her hand. If Peter had been present he would never have forgiven that "my lady," but the words from old Kinsella's lips sound grand in a way, and do not for a second detract from his dignity.

"Now Mr. Kinsella, I want to go out and see your lovely place," says Lady Ballybrig, who is a tall young woman, with sparkling brown eyes, and a lively manner. "I hear it is a little Paradise—that *we* have nothing to be compared with it. And," glancing out of the window. "There is tennis going on too. I adore tennis; my shoes are in the hall."

"But tea—you will have tea first," says Peter, bustling up. "So refreshin' after a drive."

"Oh! yes. I *should* like some tea," says Lady Saggart—more courteously, laying her hand on old Kinsella's arm.

"And after tea, you shall put on my shoes," says Lady Ballybrig, slipping her arm into Peter's. It has occurred to her lively ladyship that much fun may be got out of Peter.

"Now's our time," says Denis Butler to Sophie. "Let us make a run for it."

And indeed it is a splendid opportunity. Lady Ballybrig has carried off Sir Fell in her train, and Lady Saggart—more has impounded Nora, who is a great favourite with her. Not that Nora would have interfered with them, but that Sophie, seeing Nora's look of dejection, would not have cared to leave her alone. Now, the world lies open to them.

"Quick. Quick, before Sir Fell misses me!" whispers Sophie, and together the two conspirators, in high good humour, slip through the big French window out on to the lawn. It takes them only another second to get round the corner, and lost, in the dense shubberies.

"What a time you have been!" says Denis, when at last they have paused, as much to regain breath as to tell each other all their thoughts. "I've been here since cock-crow, well—since four in the afternoon at all events, and now it is just five."

"I know!" says she breathlessly. "It was all Sir Fell's fault—he *wouldn't* hurry. He did it on purpose, I know! He kept fiddle-faddling about all sorts of nonsensical things whilst Nora and I were *grinding* on the hall-door step. Even the fact that the beloved scarecrows were giving way beneath the old barouche did not move him."

"I could believe anything of him!" says Denis comfortably. "Well," with open and undisguised joy, "here you are now, any way."

"Yes. Here I am," says she. She laughs too, and gives him back his kiss, with an honest earnestness that makes his heart grow glad within him.

"Denis," says she, when the first amenities are at an end. "Did you hear that Sir Fell is going to marry Miss Baxter?"

"Hear it? Am I alive?" demands he. "Of course I've

heard it. And after all, Sophie, I don't want you to be disquieted over it. She looks to me to be straight enough."

"She is like Mrs. Moriarty, the butcher's wife," says Sophie, whose criticisms have, at all events, the advantage of being clear.

"Oh, I know all that. She's awful in lots of ways. But she's good natured, and I've noticed that she laughs a good deal. Light-hearted people are generally good," says Mr. Butler, airing his small amount of learning in the great lesson of human nature without a pang of self-remorse, "they have seldom anything evil to think about, you know, so they can afford to be gay."

"She looks to me," says Sophie, "as if—well as if she had a strong mind!"

"And so much the better," says Butler, determined to give her courage in spite of herself. "I've no doubt in the world that she will be 'one in the eye' for Sir Fell—but all that will be to your good, eh?"

"Will it?" dismally. "It may be *two* in the eye for us!"

"Nonsense, Sophie. It isn't like you to take such a pessimistic view of things. I haven't a doubt in the world that she will be good to you and Nora. Who could help it? And really she isn't half bad. By-the-bye, is there anything new about Nora?"

"No! Nothing! Poor darling! you saw just now that she let Lady Saggartmore carry her off to the tea-room, because Sir Fell's eye was on her. Sir Fell is encouraging Mr. Carnegie!"

"Yes. Well?"

"Well—that's all."

"But *why* is he encouraging him? I know you want me to ask that."

"Yes, I do. Do you know why he is trying to make Nora marry him?—because he knows she *won't*!"

"More than that, even," says Butler in high disdain. "I believe he thinks or has found out in some way that Carnegie would be glad to marry her without any fortune, and so he throws in his weight for Carnegie!"

"Well—that's the shabbiest thing I ever heard of," says Sophie slowly, as if shocked into a certain calm. "It is true, perhaps?"

"It is certainly true"

"Yes, I fear so. All day long he has been hammering at her about Cyril. And she, poor darling, has been so wretched."

Butler makes some inarticulate remark. It is indeed with difficulty that he now restrains himself. Suddenly she says:

"I don't think she cares for Mr. Carnegie."

Butler is silent for a moment or two, and then:

"No," says he. "But—I am sure it would be a good thing if she did."

"Do you? Yes, I think so too. And yet, I don't know. I have strong! strong reasons, Denis, for thinking Cyril is in love with Nora." She is thinking of Nora's confession—of the fact that Cyril had asked her to marry him. She would have given almost anything to tell Denis of this newly-discovered knowledge of hers, but loyalty to Nora forbids her.

"I am sure he is," says Denis contemptuously. "As much in love as he ever *could* be, but——"

"Oh, Denis!" Sophie's face pales a little. She looks at him. "'As much as he ever could be,' what do you mean by that? Do you think," in a low, most miserable tone, "that he is—in love too with that *horrid* Mrs. Vancourt?"

"I don't think he is in love with anyone really," says Denis, hardening his heart. "I think he doesn't know the meaning of the word love. I love you, Sophie—and *you* love me—don't you?" She gives him a little hug as an illustration of the truth of her answer—"And you know neither you nor I, would ever care to——Well——ever philander with another. But Ferris—he likes Nora better than anyone else, I daresay, but—but——After all, how can I tell how it is with him?" says Butler, breaking off short. "It is difficult for some fellows to understand other fellows, and—one shouldn't judge anyone harshly—and——"

"I don't want to judge anyone," says Sophie with a sigh. "Answer me only this thing, Denis. Could *one*," solemnly, "who loved *one*, make love to *another* one?"

This is too much for Butler.

"You should ask me an easy one," says he, with deep reproach. "I can only say that I know *one* one,"

gazing intently at her, "who knows *one* one, who couldn't possibly ever again look at *another* one!"

"Of course, if you are going to make *fun* out of it!" says Sophie—distinct offence in her whole tone and air.

"*Fun* of it! My dear girl, what do you take me for? A Goth? I thought it was a riddle, and I answered it to the best of my ability—a small best, at best——"

The younger Miss Carew replies with dignity:

"I think I should like to return to the others," says she.

"No, you wouldn't," says Mr. Butler, catching her frock, and pulling her back to her seat beside him. "Oh! you untruthful girl! Do you know where you will go to if you tell tarradiddles? and if you are unkind to your own true love?"

"I'm sure I don't know where *he* is."

"Sophia!"

"*Don't* call me that," says Sophie indignantly. "It reminds me of Sir Fell. You wouldn't like me to call *you* names."

"I wouldn't care what you called me," says Mr. Butler, liberally, "so long as you called me *early*! And what's in a name, after all?"

"Call me Daphne, call me Chloris,
Call me Lalage, or Doris,
Only, ONLY, call me thine!"

"Really, I do think, Denis, I'm sorry for you," says Sophie; and then, considerably *mal gré*, she laughs a little.

"I wouldn't be as silly as you for a good deal," says she, giving him a scathing little glance from under her long lashes.

"Pity is akin to love," quotes Mr. Butler forcibly. "I like you to be sorry for me."

Upon this silence ensues. A silence spent by Mr. Butler in regarding with open admiration the pretty countenance beside him.

"Have you exhausted all your priceless fund of conversation?" demands Sophie presently, when she can stand his examination of her features no longer. She had her head turned scornfully away from him, but she saw him all the same. Girls are like that.

"No," says Butler, "I've a great deal to say to you still—so much that it will take me my lifetime to get through with it—but at that moment my thoughts overpowered my

tongue. I was thinking of something I was reading last night—some lines. They so exactly suit you, Sophie, that," with an ardent but determined air, "I must insist upon making them known to you."

"If it's another quotation, I won't listen to it," says Sophie, making a valiant effort to break loose from his enclosing arm.

"My dear girl, you *must*. It's from Spenser. You needn't be afraid; it's strictly proper. Now hear it."

"I will *not*——"

"'Fair is my Love,'" begins Mr. Butler rapturously, holding her tight all the time, and apparently oblivious of her struggles (which are slight), her indignation (which is intense), everything, in fact, save the exaltation that has seemingly made him its prey.

"Fair is my Love, when her fair golden hairs,
With the loose wind ye waving chance to mark;
Fair, when the rose in her red cheeks appears——"

("Red!" cries Sophie, now honestly offended.)

"Or in her eyes the fire of love does spark!"

"You'll never see that 'spark' for *you*," says Sophie, with deep scorn; breaking finally away from him, and standing a yard or two away, plucking at a rose bush. "What's the matter with you to-day, Denis? Do you know that when you look at me like that you look horrid."

"I know I do," says Mr. Butler. "But how can I help it. I've got a pain——" Here Sophie grows rigid. "A pain in my *heart*," says Mr. Butler reproachfully. "What *were* you thinking of? I'm in love with you, Sophie; and you are bad to me—and——"

"I do hope," says Sophie, with depressing vigour, and in a clear tone that has no nonsense in it, "that you are not going in for folly of that sort. I'm tired of it. Nora is so full of it, that I've decided against it for the rest of *my* life. Sentiment is all very well in its way, but—I have learned to distrust it. If," solemnly, "you love me, Denis, you may say so right out; but don't, for goodness sake, keep on quoting things at me. I *hate* quotations. Deeds, not words, for *me*."

"Say you so!" cries Mr. Butler, springing to his feet. "Then deeds be it. Sophie, I shall kiss you!"

"That you *never* shall," says Sophie, standing undaunted in his path, and putting out both her arms to bar his progress. "At least, not *now*." Her defiance of him is so strong, that Mr. Butler goes down before it.

"Yet a deed there is bound to be," says he. "If I can't have a kiss, I must have something else. Something to bear away with me after this day's battle. If not a kiss—then a hairpin. Sophie, prepare to lose a hairpin."

"Not I," says Sophie; she turns, gives him one swift, indescribable glance, and, in a second is gone. To follow her is but the work of another second, and presently, if any one of the guests at Mr. Kinsella's tennis-party had been there to see, there was on view for them (without the inevitable shilling to pay for admittance) the edifying spectacle of a maiden, in modern attire, flying before a youth clad in a most respectable grey suit. A tall shrub, standing in the middle of a bare grass plot, becomes at last the centre of their hunting ground. Round and round this astonished shrub (that really seems to shiver with horror at every circle made) they rush—until at last Mr. Butler, gaining an inch or so, is enabled to lay his hand upon the arm of his prey, and drag her into custody.

To seize her, to lift his ruthless hand to seek to withdraw the desired memento of this auspicious occasion from her head, is the conqueror's first thought. He might even have succeeded in his fell design, but for a low shriek that springs from her.

"Oh! Denis, darling, if you do that, my hair will come down!"

This is tragedy, indeed! Butler drops the hand about to commit the fatal deed, and gives his victim freedom.

Sophie wheels round and looks at him; they are both a little out of breath.

"Hah!" cries Sophie victoriously, "I *knew* I should win the battle!" Her voice is triumphant. Her eyes are sparkling. She throws back her head, and laughs. Her little white throat gleams in the sunshine. She is looking lovely!

"Traitor!" says Butler. He is laughing too. They look at each other, and then involuntarily they both lean forward—their arms close round each other. It is the honestest, the tenderest kiss in the world that they

exchange. It does not even occur to them to be shy or embarrassed; do they not *love* each other?

"As I've got the kiss, I'm forgiven, I suppose?"

"Oh! you know I always forgive you," says Sophie. "Come, let us go back to the others. I know Sir Fell is looking for me everywhere."

"Except here—thank heaven!" says Mr. Butler.

Still holding her hand, they make for the courts below. No trace of the late small quarrel betrays itself in their faces. They are at one again!

All is bliss!

CHAPTER XX.

"And who can marvel o'er thy grief,
Or who can blame thy flowing tears
That knows their source?"

"In the town of Kilkenny there runs a clear stream,
* * * * *
Her mind, like the river, is mild, clear and pure,
But her heart is more hard than is marble I'm sure."

MEANTIME Nora has been swept in Lady Saggartmore's train from the tea-room to the tennis-court. Outside the heat is almost oppressive, and in the little white tents dotted here and there, people for the most part are hiding themselves away. Eusebius Brush, seeing her, comes to her rescue and carries her with him to a cool spot beneath some trees where a few others are lounging, some on the grass, some on garden chairs beneath huge snowy umbrellas.

"I hope you haven't been so rash as to take tea," says he. "On such a day as this it means ruin to the complexion. No," regarding her with a careful scrutiny, "you have not."

"Yes, I have," says Nora.

"Well, at all events, thank Heaven, it has not gone to your nose!" says he. "Just look at Miss Baxter's."

But Nora has no eyes to spare for even such a thrilling spectacle as Miss Baxter's nose. Her gaze is fixed on Mrs. Vancourt, who, dainty-sweet as usual in look and attire, is listening with an air of evident *bon camaraderie* to Ferris, who is standing beside her.

If Ferris sees Nora's reproachful gaze, he at all events

affects not to do so, but to Eusebius, who has followed Nora's glance, it seems that Cyril grows suddenly fidgett—restless—and a little inattentive to the pretty little creature beside him.

After awhile indeed he walks on a step or two, Mrs Vancourt with him, and presently, when they have stopp'd to speak to one or two people *en route*, they turn the corner of a tent and are lost to view. An unconscious sigh—sharp, and full of pain—breaks from Nora. It goe to Eusebius' light but kindly heart.

"I say Nora! you *have* got yourself up to-day," says he "You look lovely. Sir Fell must have been flinging cheques about."

"Has he?" says Nora smiling by a great effort. "I so, I didn't pick them up."

"No! Then the mystery grows deeper. I hope, my good child, you haven't been robbing any one."

"Oh! no. It is not I who am a robber," says Nora answering, however, more the bitterness of her own heart than Eusebius.

"These be assertions," says Eusebius, still very lightly though he is honestly sorry for her, the more so in that he is quite aware of all the circumstances of the case, and holds Ferris as a cur. "Is thy servant a robber? Come Nora! Pretty girls like you should be good-natured to their ugly neighbours. And—" suddenly—"there is one neighbour—not that I think him ugly—who has been hoping for a recognition from you for some time."

"Oh! yes; I know," says Nora, impatiently, shrugging her shoulders slightly, and looking bored. She is indeed too sad at heart, poor child, to find anything but discomfort in the thought of the admiration of anyone.

She has been for the past few minutes aware that Carnegie, who is talking to Mrs. Brush, has been regarding her with eager attention. She knows that a look, a smile from her is all he is waiting for, to bring him to her side. A sudden hateful conviction that he is in love with her strikes cold upon her heart. How, or why the knowledge is born within her, she does not know—but that it is there written in large characters for ever—sure—indelible—is beyond all doubt. A horror of Carnegie possesses her for the moment; with her own soul so filled with love for another, it seems unbearable to her that a stranger—a man

outsider—should dare to love *her*. And his persistent gaze! The way in which his eyes turn to her, as though there is nothing else to see in all this wide, smiling beautiful day—all this angers her in a wild, unreasoning fashion, and makes her sad heart cold within her.

Without looking at him, and whilst still pretending to keep up a desultory conversation with Eusebius (who indeed is doing all the work in a highly conscientious manner), she knows that Carnegie has detached himself from Mrs. Brush's pungent criticisms of her neighbours, and is coming towards her.

A faint feeling that she must turn and run—run anywhere, so long as it will take her away from this coming fate, seizes upon her—only to be suppressed as hopeless the moment later. She is here. The world is looking on. Even to Eusebius she would be ashamed to confess her wild desire for flight. And Mr. Carnegie is coming. The knowledge of his feeling towards her, so lately arrived at, helps her to another knowledge. She must be gracious, if cold, to him. To conceal her annoyance at his presence is imperative. To betray it, would be in her present frame of mind almost to *accuse* him of loving her!

Yet alas; poor Nora! She is so little of a diplomatist!

Carnegie has now come up to her, and his kind, strong, trustable face—a face that if not handsome, is yet admirable in all ways, is before her. There is unmistakable delight printed on it.

"I thought you were never coming," says he.

"Never is a long day," returns Nora sententiously. Eusebius has taken the opportunity of Carnegie's coming, to slip away.

"I have found it so," says Carnegie with his pleasant smile.

"Naturally! garden parties as a rule are very dull," says Nora, feeling very dull herself, and being determined to take no notice of his little smartness.

"That was hardly my reason for finding this one dull," says he.

"No?" Smiling a smile, that goes over his shoulder and is wintry enough to kill the shrubs beyond. "That is because you were doing nothing. 'To be idle is to be, not only mischievous, but miserable.'"

"You wrong me," says he, "I have been doing a great

deal. I have been wrestling with a terrible monster. His name is despair. I have been sitting here, expecting you, for the past two hours."

"I told you, you were idle," says she, still with that terribly sad, little, wintry smile.

"Ah! You do not understand," says he, throwing off his usual air and growing singularly earnest. "It was hard work. The hardest a man can do. But I like hard work," relaxing once again into his kindly manner, though retaining still a good deal of that strange quick fire. "I never weary of work," says he, smiling at her. "I shall always fight to the last for anything I want to gain. That is the way to win, isn't it?"

"I am not a soldier," says Nora icily, looking away from him.

"And therefore cannot understand me. To return to the cause of battle."

"Why return?" says she.

"Because I want to tell you," says he, a little doggedly perhaps, "that I had given up all hope of your coming—that I began to think there was little use in expecting you any longer."

"That only shows how poor were your calculations," says Nora calmly. "Never tell yourself that about me again. I am one of those people whom you may always expect! I am sure to come—sure—if not to-day, certainly to-morrow."

"Ah! But I should like you always to come to-day," says Carnegie lightly, though in truth his soul is lying heavy within him. Her whole air, the little, half-averted glance, the chill in the silvery voice, all tell a tale—the *same* tale!

Yet never, in spite of all this discouragement, has Carnegie felt so thoroughly as now that she is the one woman the world contains whom he would care to have for his own. Never has it been so surely borne in upon him that he loves her with all his heart and soul. Never *until* now, had he quite understood how dear she was to him. There had been that night when he had walked up with her through the path flooded with moonlight, when the truth had been first laid bare to him, but that truth seems *now* a barren thing beside the rush of passion that has *taken* hold of him in this sweet hour—an hour as bitter as it is ensweetened. For now all his loss, all his gain, has *come*

home to him. Before, he was restless when away from her, a little troubled in temper perhaps, a little impatient. He scarcely knew why—he knew only that he was calm when with her, and that when not with her, he thought of her, and longed for her always. And when he thought of her it was by her name. Not as Miss Carew, but as Nora—Nora Creina! It had not occurred to him in those old days (that now seem a thousand years ago, though in truth they are but round the corner as it were) that this name for her was but another name for Love!

"It is very flattering!" says Nora, with her cold little smile. She lets her glance wander away listlessly to a group in the distance. "What a hideous gown that is, on Lady Ballybrig," she says petulantly. "It hurts one's eyes." All things indeed, have grown hideous to her, because of the misery at her heart.

"I thought it rather striking," says Carnegie, in whose eyes the gown in question—a charming, if a rather pronounced one—has found favour. "If it hurts you, however, let me take you away from it. They are playing rounders in the lower field. Shall we come and see them?"

"Very well," says Nora indifferently.

CHAPTER XXI.

"Let us pray to Him who holds life's issues in His hands,
Him who formed the mighty globe, with all its thousand lands,
Girdling them with seas and mountains, rivers deep, and strands,
To cast a look of pity upon Kathleen-ny-Houlahan!"

"I NEVER yet saw such a fool as that girl," says Mrs. Brush, almost before Nora is decently out of earshot. Mrs. Brush draws up her gaunt figure with a sniff, and glares round her—at nobody in particular. She generally (unless on extreme occasions) prefers to address the many, rather than the few. She likes an audience. "There she is! deliberately upsetting the designs of Providence! Impious, I call it!"

"But what designs?" asks Miss Baxter, with a sudden interest that at once rouses speculation in the breasts of those around. Is she going to marry Sir Fell? If so, it is doubtless a great point with her to get the girls married as soon as possible, and out of the way. When a woman marries, she always hates the first family, and though the

Carews don't actually belong to Sir Fell, still it is pretty much the same thing, and, at all events, quite as uncomfortable. And though Miranda Baxter is undoubtedly "*on*," don't you know, still there was Mrs. Montmorency O'Leary, who was quite *fifty* when she married, and there was quite a large family afterwards.

"Bless me, haven't you seen how things have been going on?" demands Mrs. Brush sharply. "If not, you must be a mole indeed. Why I thought it would have been to your interests—from all I'm told—to look after those girls' future destiny. Out of sight, out of mind, you know."

"Well, I don't," says Miss Baxter, eyeing her adversary with a gaze that perhaps for the first time in her life reduces Mrs. Brush to powder. "It isn't so easy to put people out of mind as you seem to think. But after all, I daresay I haven't understood you. You've been saying a good deal—but to me, at all events, it was of so vague an order, that I haven't caught your drift. To come back to it. What *are* these designs you speak of. I *may* be a mole, but even moles have some intelligence of some kind, I suppose, and I should like to have mine satisfied."

"Well," says Mrs. Brush, now entirely cowed, and with her crest lowered, but with rage in her heart. "It is open to all the world to see that Mr. Carnegie is in love with Nora, and that Nora is in love with that worthless creature, Cyril Ferris."

She has lowered her tone on saying this, though sorely against her will. But Eusebius, who is sun, moon and stars to her, has tapped her on the shoulder, and with a glance compelled her to reduce her confidences to one.

The one, receives it calmly.

"Why is Mr. Ferris worthless?" asks Miss Baxter.

"Because he is playing a sure game with Mrs. Vancourt, and a fast and loose one with Nora." It is Eusebius who says this.

"And Mr. Carnegie?"

"He could never play fast and loose with any woman," says Eusebius shortly. He is doing all he can for Nora in view of this woman becoming in a sense her stepmother. If Eusebius had permitted himself to love anyone it would certainly have been Nora.

"And such a good catch," says Mrs. Brush. "His brother, Lord Connamore, is next door to dead and no

children—it is perfect madness, I tell you, to see that girl refusing him day by day.”

“Hardly that,” says Eusebius. “He hasn’t proposed yet.”

“Because she won’t let him. She is as I tell you,” says Mrs. Brush with acrimony, “in love with Cyril, who is the basest deceiver I know. I’m perfectly certain he is going to marry in the long run that silly little fool Mrs. Van-court.”

“Is she silly?” asks Miss Baxter in her deep bass.

“She’s worse,” says Mrs. Brush, who loves to destroy a character. “She’s pernicious! Even within the sacred precincts of a church she can’t conduct herself with propriety. Last Sunday I could barely endure to sit in the same edifice with her. Such gigglings, such whisperings—whisperings behind a *fan*, moreover! A fan in church!” says Mrs. Brush, as though a fan is an implement used in Hell. “She thought, I daresay, that she was in a theatre.”

“Good heavens! Nothing so bad as that I hope,” says Eusebius, who, I regret to say, is enjoying himself.

“Yes—a fan,” says his mother, who, though she adores, never quite fathoms him. “And that is not all,” looking round her and, in spite of her son’s efforts, including the many people near her in her remarks. “She was discovered whilst the sermon was going on, drawing a caricature of our respected Rector.”

“She must be regarded as lost indeed,” says Eusebius.

“Oh, I don’t think that!” says a pretty woman—a Mrs. Moore, who is in a low chair on their left. “No woman can be completely lost who has the heart to dress as well as she can.”

“In my opinion she is beyond argument,” says Mrs. Brush severely, and with all the air of one who is putting her foot down upon all further discussion. “She is a mere butterfly. She is positively characterless. Laodicean—neither hot nor cold—one who has *no* religious convictions.”

“A Pagan?” asks Mrs. Moore, in an amused tone.

“Not so much that,” says Mrs. Brush, with a condemnatory glance at pretty Mrs. Moore, “as a type of the young woman of this latter half of the present century. The young woman who has no firm basis for her views, and who is all things to all men.”

“Oh, good gracious!” says Mrs. Moore, lifting her fan

to her face. "Don't take away our characters like that. All things to *all* men. Oh, *my*!" She turns to the woman beside her, who is shading herself with a big white umbrella, the wife of the adjutant stationed in the next town, and both give way to silent laughter, that shakes them.

"I know what you mean," says Miss Baxter, in her loud voice. Her back is turned to them, so she has not seen the laughter of the frivolous pair hidden under the white umbrella. "A creature swayed by every wind. One who is sweet to you to-day, and who will believe the worst of you to-morrow."

"A negative!" suggests Eusebius. "Let us hope it will soon be broken. But I don't think Mrs. Vancourt is like that. *She* is a positive."

"In one sense," says Mrs. Brush sternly. "In my opinion she is a positive disgrace! A disgrace to Society."

"Oh, come!" says Eusebius. "That's going far, isn't it?" Eusebius is lying full length—a tremendous length—upon the hot grass with his hands clasped behind his head. Had he heard suddenly that Mrs. Vancourt had been hanged, drawn and quartered, I think he would have rejoiced in Nora's interests, but to hear her maligned like this in cold blood, stirs him. After all, poor thing, she is only a woman, and women are such fools that one should do the best for them! This is the creed of Eusebius.

"I could hardly go far enough," says Mrs. Brush, her voice rising. "Once for all, Eusebius, don't talk of what you know nothing about. You know you detest Mrs. Vancourt, and a thousand times you have yourself told me, that if you detest a person, it is only folly to discuss her. You remember?"

"Yes, I remember that dark saying," says Eusebius, giving up the contest, and going back to his lounge and his cigar with some ease of conscience.

"I know all your jargon as well as my own," continues his mother, with a somewhat resentful glance at him. She would have liked to continue the argument and bring him over to her side. "Where I say bad, you say fast. I have even heard the word rapid. It *used* to be applied to a river, but *now*—well, in my opinion, Mrs. Vancourt is as fast as she can be."

Here Mrs. Moore emerges from under the umbrella.

"But her frocks, Mrs. Brush," says this intrepid young

woman. "Her frocks! One must consider them. Could a woman who evolved such frocks as hers out of her inner consciousness be dubbed hopelessly lost?—be classed amongst the—(How do you call it?)—the unselected? Surely *something* ought to be allowed to her."

"*You* can allow her whatever you like," says Mrs. Brush grimly. "A thousand a year if you wish. I've no doubt she won't object to it, especially as birds of a feather are generally supposed to flock together, and no doubt you will have thoughts in common. And as to classes. The fast woman has many classes. There are the clever ones, and the ones that pose as saints, and," with an awful glance that casts frivolous little Mrs. Moore into instant Purgatory, "the downright *fool*!"

Mrs. Moore flushes, and half rises.

"Oh, there is yet another sort of fool—an old fool," begins she—but before she can finish this promising sentence she is dragged back by her friend into the deep recesses of the white umbrella.

"It's getting warmer," says Eusebius with a contemplative gaze around him; indeed the heavens are aglow, and the earth is simmering. Something else is simmering too!

"Mrs. Vancourt will be warmer before I am done with her," says Mrs. Brush. "And," with an ireful glance at the white umbrella, that is wobbling curiously as if one person were trying to hold it up and another to knock it down. "And her companions in iniquity too. So, I warn them."

Here the umbrella is very nearly upheaved, but presently is righted again.

"Mrs. Vancourt seems to me a rather charming person," says Miss Baxter. "And as Mrs. Moore says, she always looks smart. Now I——"

She breaks off suddenly; and her always high colour grows apoplectic. Indeed, they all show sudden signs of consternation, except Mrs. Moore and her friend, who now finally abandon the umbrella and prepare to enjoy themselves once more.

"Who are you discussing?" asks Cyril Ferris, who has just come up to them unobserved, giving a delightful smile to each in turn.

"Mrs. Vancourt," says Eusebius, promptly, if lazily—he turns on his side and looks full at Ferris. "Miss Baxter

was saying delightful things about her. She was calling her smart."

"Yes," says Ferris, raising his brows in a little, insolent way he has, and smiling now at Miss Baxter directly. The smile is not pleasant; he is indeed wishing he had not come up to this particular group, but someone had told him Nora was here, after he had got away from Mrs. Vancourt with some difficulty. "But is that the word for her?"

"Best of all words," says Eusebius. "She is nothing if *not* smart. Mrs. Moore has just been giving us a dissertation on her frocks, my mother on her morals. We have arranged between us that she is smart all round."

"What a detestable word," says Ferris with irritation ill-suppressed. "Cruelly vulgar."

"It's my word," says Miss Baxter slowly, fixing him with her stern eyes, "and I stick to it. Vulgar or not, it describes Mrs. Vancourt!"

"Poor Mrs. Vancourt," says Mrs. Moore, with her light little laugh. "Dolly, pick up the umbrella, we shall want it again presently."

"A capital word," says Eusebius, who detests Ferris.

"Mrs. Vancourt is smart enough in all conscience."

"Am I to understand that you think Mrs. Vancourt vulgar?" asks Ferris, taking no notice of either Mrs. Moore or Brush, and turning his gaze slowly on Miss Baxter. "How strange! Do you know," with studied impertinence, "that people in her own set think her charming?"

"Do they?" says Eusebius. His face is quite calm as he regards Ferris, yet he is laughing in his heart at the sure knowledge that Ferris has made one more life-long enemy in Miranda Baxter. An enemy very close to Nora. "But why charming? Charming," throwing out his hand, "touches so much. Talent—genius—learning, even common education! I hear," deliberately, "that Mrs. Vancourt's education is not her strong point. I'm told she can write her name—but very badly. Deplorably, in fact."

"We have all been told so *many* things about her acquaintances," says Ferris with an uneasy smile, meant to be mirthful, but which is very much the reverse.

"Say if I hurt you," says Eusebius lazily, taking the glass out of his eye and planting it in again more securely, to catch, as it were, his companion's real meaning.

"Hurt *me!* my *dear* fellow!"

"Ah! quite so!" says Eusebius. "Well! as the coast is clear, I may as well go on." He pauses. To hurt Ferris is to hurt Mrs. Vancourt too, but Nora—has *she* not been hurt between these two? A sort of savage feeling catches him, and with a little low laugh he falls back upon the hot grass, in an easy, lounging, happy position. "The story goes," says he out loud and in a clear tone, "that when she was engaged to her late husband, she never answered his ardent notes in her own hand. She simply telegraphed. The telegraph department, they say, lost considerably on her marriage. Of late she has taken to type-writing. Does she," lazily, "type-write much to you?"

"You seem to be so thoroughly *au fait* with all her doings," says Ferris, who is white with rage, "that I shall leave you to answer that for yourself. You say she is not educated—however, with regard to that——"

"Tut!" says the loud voice of his mother. "Let the education alone. In *my* young days it used to be considered good form, to spell cow with a 'k.' But what is the matter with that little fool of a Vancourt is, want of *family!* She's got no family. That goes without saying, as our French neighbours have it. She hasn't a grand-father to her name. I know it!" says this inexorable old woman with a vicious force—who, however rude she is, has what the Germans call sixteen quarterings to her back. "She's hall-marked as *dross*," says she, tilting her old nose.

"Mrs. Moore, won't you come and have a game of tennis?" says Ferris abruptly.

"No thanks! Never play!" says Mrs. Moore.

"Except Nap or Loo!" supplements her friend, at which they both laugh.

"No, really now, I'm not a gambler," says Mrs. Moore.

Ferris hardly hears them, he goes past them all, as quickly as courtesy will permit, his head in the air, his heart on fire. Below there, is Nora, with Carnegie. At the same moment Sir Fell, coming up to Miss Baxter, carries her off to a distant tent, where tea is to be had.

Eusebius looks after her.

"I like her, I think," says he.

"Nonsense!" says his mother—who is never happy unless abusing somebody—"what do you see in her?"

"An ugly face—a strong will—a virtuous mind!"

"You are a romancer," snorts his mother. "She is a designing, low-born woman, who wants to marry my brother for the sake of his title."

"She has money. It is a fair exchange," says Eusebius.

"It may be," says Mrs. Brush. "But she is a common person, and she is as yellow as a kite's claw!"

This seems to put a fitting end to the conversation.

CHAPTER XXII.

"I wish, I wish, I wish in vain,
I wish I had my heart again,
And vainly think I'd not complain
Is go de tu mo murn in slán."

NORA has just dropped languidly into a garden chair; Lady Saggartmore is occupying Carnegie's attention. The moment is propitious for Ferris, as he comes up, an excited gleam in his dark blue eyes.

"Come, come at once. I must speak with you," says he, his tone almost a command. She rises involuntarily, and passing Carnegie looks up at him, and nods her head gently.

"Tea," she murmurs, and passes on with Ferris. Carnegie loses his place a little in his conversation with Lady Saggartmore, but beyond that makes no sign of chagrin. To endeavour to recover his lost ground would be absurd. Lady Saggartmore is babbling on to him about her coming dance, and the difficulty of finding enough men in such a little out-of-the-way Irish town, and Nora is already almost out of sight. It is with a pang he notices that she has not taken the way that would lead her to the tent where tea is to be found.

"Perhaps she had seen her stepfather go in there," he says to himself, with a curious desire to believe anything rather than that she had wanted to go away with Ferris.

Meantime the latter, with Nora, has reached a secluded spot—behind one of the tents, and securely guarded from observation at the back by a huge laurustinus now in full flower.

"Well," says Nora slowly. "You have brought me here. To what purpose?"

"Purpose!" He reddens warmly. "Is it not always the same purpose? Do I not always want you——?"

"Not always," says the girl very distinctly.

"I know what you are thinking of," begins he hotly—but she interrupts him.

"I am not thinking of anything," returns she haughtily, "I was merely answering your question." She is very pale. Her heart indeed is sick within her. But there is a little smile about her lips, that puzzles and enchants him. Always beautiful, with this new air of defiance—defiance that borders almost on contempt—Nora captivates afresh the worthless heart, on which all her young sweet hopes are set. She had seen him with Mrs. Vancourt—she had hated herself for the wild jealousy that shook her, as she watched them—she had told herself then, that she must study to be calm—careful—emotionless.

"To tune the sitar neither high nor low,"

to show herself outwardly indifferent, however the storm might rage within.

Now, however, her misery grows too much for her—her bitterness breaks out—the sitar is being tuned too high this time. Scorn of him trembles in her sad voice.

"You are misjudging me as usual," says Ferris, "you think that I——"

"I tell you I am thinking of nothing," cries she passionately.

"And I tell you, you *are*," says he, quite as passionately—a fierce anger against her, born of his hatred of his own duplicity, is making him almost brutal. The very fairness of her, as she stands here before him, only adds to the violence of his feelings. "I tell you, you believe I am playing a double game—that I am deliberately making love to——"

"Stop!" says she in a low, but terrible tone. "Not another word! Not—" vehemently—"one! I forbid you to mention her name to me." She breaks off suddenly and, leaning her back against the trunk of an old tree, spreads abroad her little lovely hands with a gesture of despair. "Has it come to *this* between us?" says she. "Is *this* to be the end of it?" She is looking at him, with her white face uplifted and a sombre meaning in her great dark eyes.

"If so—it is you who have ended it," says he sullenly.

She turns abruptly as if to leave him, but he springs forward and catches her arm.

"Don't go, Nora. Not like this. Look here! Do you think you are the only one who has got something to complain of? How have *you* spent your day? Tell me that. Do you think I have not seen? You accuse me of disloyalty—but *you*—you have spent hours with him——"

"Are you speaking of Mr. Carnegie?" says Nora, shaking off his grasp of her arm. "Yes. I spent the greater part of this hateful afternoon with him. Why not? who else had I to speak to? The one I should have liked to be with, did not like to be with me. And Mr. Carnegie is a pleasant companion enough!"

"So you seemed to find him, certainly."

"What did you want?" asks she coldly. "That I should sit in a corner and dream of you and your devotion, whilst your devotion was wandering elsewhere? I shall not do that again. Mr. Carnegie can make himself interesting when he chooses."

"Can he? You have peculiar tastes. His conversation, I should have thought, would have been as dry as his wine; and, to do him justice," with an unpleasant laugh, "his sherry *is* dry. And his remarks, how neat they are," with an expression of disgust. "I have listened to him when with women" (this is a careful touch) "and one always knows just where the little compliment is coming in."

"Better than just knowing where the little sting is coming in. He is good-natured, at all events."

"He is an angel of light, no doubt," says Ferris viciously, with a light laugh.

"He may be anything at all; but he has one virtue for which I can vouch. He never abuses *you*."

There is the slightest pause! then she turns again.

"Come," says she, "I want to find Sophie."

"Just one moment," entreats he, as if choking. Indeed it has seemed to him as if she is really loosening (and of her own accord) the strings that are binding them each to each, and that goes hard with him. To give *her* up is one thing—that she should give *him* up is quite another. The insatiable vanity of the man, together with the curious passion for her (the strongest he ever *has* known, the strongest he ever *will* know), compels him to try and redeem his position with her.

"Well," says she, stopping and looking back at him, her beautiful eyes cold and condemnatory.

"We cannot talk here," says he, with agitation. "All these people coming and going ties my tongue. Meet me to-night—to-night, darling——"

"No," says Nora.

He goes up to her and, taking both her little, cold and irresponsive hands, presses them violently.

"Have you forgotten?" says he.

"What is there to remember, except that," echoing his words, "'All these people coming and going' may see you holding my hands."

She laughs a little wildly as he drops her hands on her words, and looks quickly round him.

"You see," says she, laughing still—that sad laugh—"you see!"

"It is your desire to put me at a disadvantage," exclaims he savagely. "Am I to understand that you *refuse* to meet me this evening?"

"I refuse."

"Nora——"

Whatever else he may have been about to say is now frozen on his tongue.

The sound of the swish, swish of a silken petticoat can be heard just close to them, and in another instant a little gracious Paris-clad figure comes rustling up to them, with a beaming smile upon its face.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"The work that should to-day be wrought
Defer not till to-morrow;
The help that should within be sought,
Scorn from without to borrow."

"CYRIL! At last I have found you," cries Mrs. Vancourt, advancing towards Ferris and Nora with a little delighted look upon her face—the look of one who has been searching for a long time and now has found its object. There is not the slightest *arrière pensée* in the pretty smile. "Oh! Miss Carew," with a lovely look at Nora, "if I had only thought of it, I might have known he was with you; but, to tell the truth, the idea escaped me. Cyril, you must come; you must come *at once!*"

"Must I? But where?" asks Ferris, trying to speak lightly, but looking, to say the least of it, remarkably uncomfortable.

"Why, to Lady Saggartmore." She pauses, as if wondering, and then breaks into a pretty little laugh. "It seems as if you *must* know," says she. "But of course you don't. Lady Saggartmore wants you immediately; she seent me for you. She," with a charming little excitement, "says she can't do without you."

"Lady Saggartmore is very flattering," says Nora, smiling too. She looks her rival fair in the eyes as she says this; she compels herself, by bringing the strongest pressure to bear upon herself, to look honestly amused.

"Well, I'm afraid it is more his help she wants, than Mr. Ferris himself, says Mrs. Vancourt, addressing Nora. She puts in the "Mr. Ferris" carefully. He may be "Cyril" to her, he is Mr. Ferris to Nora and all the rest. It is a deliberate cruelty, small, but fierce. "The fact is, Cyril," says she, "that she is afraid Tindal's band will disappoint, and she has made her mind up to it for her dance. But there is something very special on in Dublin now. One of the Princes has come over, and—what *is* she to do? You must come to her. You know the conductor, don't you? you can work wonders therefore. Miss Carew," to Nora, "it is terribly rude of me, I know, but I'm afraid I *must* send Mr. Ferris away. If you will allow me," graciously. "I shall stay with you and convey you in safety back to your friends. You see," with another little laugh, "how useful old married woman can be to you young and fascinating girls."

It would be impossible to describe on paper the amount of insolence, and cruelty, and hatred she throws into this laughing speech.

"You are too good," says Nora coldly. "Pray go with Mr. Ferris, and reassure Lady Saggartmore. I can find my way back to my friends without an escort."

Even as she says this, she lifts her eyes and sees Carnegie coming towards her.

"Ah! Here is an escort," says she quickly. She moves towards him. "Mr. Carnegie, may I trouble you?" cries she in a little, eager, strange tone. "Will you take me to *Sophie*?"

"You couldn't trouble me," says Carnegie gravely.

She moves away with him, without so much as a backward glance at Ferris.

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"Now look here!" says Mrs. Vancourt, savagely, turning upon Ferris, as Nora and Mr. Carnegie disappear from view. "You will put an end to this at once. Do you hear?"

"An end to what?"

"Do you ask me to go into it? Well, I will if you like. I should think it would have been you who would have shrunk from the explanation. There have been love passages between you and that little *fool*!" vehemently—"you needn't deny it."

Ferris remains silent.

"Deny it. Deny it," cries Mrs. Vancourt, inconsistently, stamping her foot. "How *dare* you not deny it?"

"What is there to deny?" says Ferris, who has grown very pale. "You insult me by such an accusation."

"It would take a great deal to insult you, where your interests lie," says she; the coarse fibres of her nature coming to the front, as coarse fibres always do in cases of excitement. She is looking at him with fury in her gaze; a fury that sits almost grotesquely on her small, delicate face, and fragile form. She looks at him as though she could willingly kill him, were he to ultimately defy her.

"You have always had a high opinion of me," says he bitterly.

"I have had a true opinion. But such as you are, I like you," returns she, deliberately; "and I shall hold you bound to me. There is much between you and me, Cyril—a strong chain; break it *if you dare*!"

"Pouf!" says Cyril, lightly—hiding his disgust as well as he can, and attempting a carelessness he is far from feeling.

"You can 'Pouf' it as much as ever you like," returns she angrily. "But I stick to what I say. Break the bond that binds us, if you dare."

"Can't you see what folly you are talking?" says Cyril, who has now recovered himself somewhat; "and what injustice you do yourself. Sometimes I think, Eldon, for a lovely woman, you are the most modest of your charms that I know. Why should I wish to break with you?"

"Ah! that little Carew girl might possibly supply the *missing link there*," says she—but her tone is calmer now,

and the furtive glance she casts at him is considerably milder. "I tell you, however, Cyril, that all this must come to an end."

"Do you think I don't long for the end?" says he. There is truth in this; at this moment it seems to him that Death itself would be a good end to his troubles. Yet, he has to smile and hold her hand, and look deep into her eyes. "Eldon, why don't you trust me? You know that long before this, even in spite of the fact of your husband's late death——"

"*Late!* Why it is quite eleven months ago," says Mr. Vancourt's widow, who is now indeed floating through the world in many coats of many colours.

"Well—I put it like that," says he, easily and cleverly—his tone at all events is clever—it betrays no feeling, whatsoever, one way or the other. "But, what I desire is, to make my name in some way before marrying you."

"And how do you propose to make it?" asks Mrs. Vancourt slowly, with a rather nasty glance at him—a glance satirical, at all events.

"There has been an opening suggested by Ogilvey and Grant," says he, writhing beneath her gaze, yet not daring to make a fight. "They say——"

"Pshaw!" interrupts she, without the slightest attempt at softening down her rudeness. "Don't try to impose upon me with that sort of rubbish. I tell you what, Cyril; I don't care about your making money for me. I have money enough for both of us, thanks to old Mr. Vancourt! And, though I agree with you, in thinking that I ought not to marry again until Vancourt is quite a year dead, still—I shall require you, in the meantime to pay attentions to no one but me!"

"Well!" says Ferris. His heart is sinking within him. It would have given him the deepest joy of his life at this moment to fling her off entirely—to refuse to have anything further to do with her—but that substantial ten thousand a year is dangling always before his eyes, and, Sybarite at heart as he is, he cannot bring himself to refuse it.

"Well! You will have no more little flirtations with Miss Carew, for one thing," says she sharply. "Take that to heart. If," with a little hostile smile, "you persist in *that amusement*, I warn you, I shall make it unpleasant for *you*."

"Do you ever think," says he suddenly, maddened all at once, that I *can* break with you, that——?"

"No! never," interrupting him promptly, with a queer, little insolent laugh, "I hold you—as I tell you—by your interests. I can give you, what you have alway craved—money, position——"

"Are money and position all?" asks he—he is in a dangerous mood—a mood dangerous indeed to his own well being.

"No," says she—she falters, and looks at him. There is a pause—long enough to allow him to recover himself, and glide back into the old groove, that means all the pleasant things of life, if clouded with dishonour!

"There is love too," says he, in a low tone, carrying her hand to his lips. "And you, Eldon, you know that I love you in spite of all."

"In spite of all——" These words of his touch her. They make her pause. *Does* she believe him?

"What is 'all'?" asks she. "Miss Carew?"

"Oh! What is Miss Carew to me?" says he, with a contemptuous shrug.

CHAPTER XXIV.

"Be ye one in might and mind—
Quit the mire where cravens wallow—
And your foes will flee like wind,
From your fearless *Fág an Bealach!*"

THE luncheon bell rang five minutes ago. Nora and Sophie, who are decidedly late, scramble through the washing of their hands, and the brushing of their pretty heads, and almost tumble over each other in their desire to get down to the dining-room in time; just outside the dining-room, tremours overtake them, mingled, I regret to say, with a wild desire for laughter, and for a moment or two, they cling to each other, trying to stifle the fatal mirth that is bubbling up within them.

In another moment they are inside the door, and are walking with preternaturally solemn faces to their respective seats.

"Late as usual!" says Sir Fell, in a tone calculated to destroy any appetite—but theirs. They fall into their chairs *without making any reply, congratulating themselves,*

indeed, upon his unusual taciturnity. As a rule he opens upon them and reduces them to powder with a shower of invectives, on the smallest provocation; just now he says nothing beyond the first withering reminder. Perhaps he is too busy with the one grilled chop which he had appropriated, and which smells very nicely to the two young hungry girls, as, with the sharpened appetites of youth, they seat themselves before the two tiny slices of cold mutton, literally smothered in parsley (parsley is cheap and helps to enlarge a dish), that is all that remains to them.

"After all!" says Sir Fell presently, when the chop is finished, laying down his knife and fork delicately, and beginning to crumble his bread, "cutlets are a mistake. There *is* something"—leaning back and stretching himself luxuriously—"in the plain, unadulterated chop, in spite of all that may be said to the contrary."

"Certainly," agrees Sophie, looking up; she has finished her own little threadbare bit of mutton, and the spirit of mischief is rife within her, as Nora can see with growing fear. "There would be even more in two chops."

"More what?" sharply.

"More mutton," says Sophie.

Nora casts an imploring glance at her.

"What do you mean by that?" demands Sir Fell frowning.

"What *should* I mean? You said you thought there was something in a mutton chop. I agreed with you. A desire to keep up your conversational lead was all I meant."

"Humph!" says Sir Fell. He glowers at her from under his heavy brows, but seems at a loss as to how to proceed.

"An attack on me I presume," growls he at last.

"An attack on you? Oh, Sir Fell!" cries Sophie in her airiest tone, dragging up her brows to a level with her hair, and shrugging up her shoulders *en suite*. "On you?"

"Sophie!" whispers Nora miserably.

"What do you mean?" roars Sir Fell, who has caught the trembling whisper, and is now glad to be able to transfer his wrath from Sophie (of whom he stands a little in awe) to Nora, who is so terribly in awe of him. "How dare you try to stop your sister! If she is bent on being insolent to me let her be so. A time is coming," turning once again on Sophie, "when you will not

have only *me* to contend with—when I shall place an authority over you, who will be always on the spot and who will see that your out-goings and in-comings are in order. I have chosen a person who will be no fool, I can tell you; one who will see that you conduct yourselves with propriety, and as my daughters should.”

“Your daughters?” questions Sophie.

“My step-daughters, at all events. I thank Heaven the relationship is no closer,” says Sir Fell. He glares from one girl to the other, and then leans back in his chair and pours himself out a glass of most excellent sherry.

“I understand you perfectly, Sophia,” says he, “you wish me to understand that you consider me in the light of a gourmand. Now I am the last person in the world to whom that epithet could apply. I care nothing for luxuries; I am positively austere in my tastes; providentially so, as the expenses that you girls entail upon me would effectually prevent my ever exceeding in any way. Culinary delights have no charms for me. The delicacies of the seasons as they come round fail to attract me. Well, I confess”—with an evident and noble determination to be truthful at all costs—“I like oysters just in the beginning of the season when they first come in—but if I didn’t chance to get them, I shouldn’t repine.”

“That is because you always *do* get them,” says Sophie drily.

“I have a great mind to order you to leave the table,” says Sir Fell, almost foaming by this time. “Be silent, madam, if you can do nothing but abuse the one who has been a *father* to you from your birth.”

This is so grossly elaborated a description of the real relations between Sir Fell and the girls, that even Nora falls into secret depths of mirth, wherein she struggles valiantly for the following five minutes.

By that time, the melancholy remains of last night’s pudding have been handed round, disposed of, and once again the coast lies clear. There are on the dish before Nora a few prunes, on the dish before Sir Fell one pear! It seems an astonishing time for pears, but Sir Fell, who adores them, has had a little box of these precious forced delights sent to him during the past week, and day after day one has come up to luncheon especially for his *delectation*.

"Some prunes, Sophie?" asks Nora.

"You should ask Sir Fell first, Nora," says Sophie, with an air of assumed anxiety, bending forward towards her sister, and frowning, as if to give her to understand that probably poor Sir Fell is *dying* for a few of these scanty sweetmeats lying before Nora.

"Sir Fell?" begins Nora, clearing her throat, and actually trembling with the awful knowledge that she is in convulsions of laughter.

"No thank you," says Sir Fell pompously. "Prunes, I hear, are most nourishing for young people, that is why I order so many for you two girls. As for me, a pear suffices me. Nothing so good as a pear, I think,"—this suavely.

"Have another?" says Sophie.

"Another what?"

"Another *pair*," says Sophie, who is now in her best teasing mood.

Sir Fell stares at her.

"I was saying," says he, "that there is nothing so good as a *pear*."

"And I was saying so, too. I say there should always be a pair," says Sophie. "So nourishing, you know. Let me"—scooping up two antiquated prunes into the spoon—"give you a *pair*!"

Her eyes are so mild, so innocent, so altogether beyond reproach, as she offers these ancient dainties to Sir Fell, that he hardly knows how to receive her offer. The 1st bit of his own priceless fruit is still upon his fork, and with a little most ungraceful gulp he swallows it *too* quickly, it sticks in an ungrateful throat, and for the next two minutes the great Sir Fell sits choking, and fuming and writhing—unable to utter the anathemas that are trembling on the tip of his tongue.

These anathemas never come off. He has time to think, whilst struggling for his breath, and indignantly refusing the glass of water brought to him by the frightened Nora, to remember that a good deal depends upon these two detested girls for the success of the coming afternoon. Miss Baxter and her friends had signified their intention of coming over to Dunmore to-day to take afternoon tea with *its owner*, and the very making of that tea must be given *into the hands* of somebody. Besides, there are other

things. The girls must appear—must be in good tempers (if possible)—the whole *ménage* must be shown up in as rosy a light as circumstances will permit.

Having got over his coughing and actually compelled himself to take the glass of water from Nora, Sir Fell motions her to return to her seat, and leaning back in his own, once more scowls around him.

"A word to you both before you leave," says he.

He has recovered all his haughtiest air. That late suffocating, humiliating choke has apparently been consigned to the deepest limbo. It is now, with quite a recovered manner, he throws out his right hand and brings the girls once more to attention.

"I shall expect you both to be in the drawing-room at four o'clock sharp. I am expecting some friends of mine—the Lacys——"

"Friends!" says Sophie. The Lacys up to this have been beyond the pale.

"Certainly, friends"—sharply, yet without looking at her—"the Lacys and Miss Baxter. You will see that tea is properly served, and——"

"There is no cake," says Sophie cheerfully.

"I have seen to that, knowing how impossible it would be to trust to either of you to have anything necessary in the house. Your ideas of housekeeping have long been known to me." He says all this with quite a lofty air of reproach, whilst knowing in his soul that the limited amount allowed for household expenses barely suffices for the commonest necessities of life. "You will find some cakes in the store-room. See that they are sent in on the best plates. Take out the old Worcester, and the Queen Anne silver. I wish to have everything as delicately arranged as possible. As for the bread and butter, I must request that it will be properly cut and *rolled*, not sent in in *junks* as it was last time."

"I suppose if we see to all this we need not appear?" says Sophie, calmly.

"Not appear? What do you mean?" exclaims Sir Fell, violently. "I *command* you to appear. Do you wish to slight my guests? You would if you dared, I am sure; but remember I desire you to be present."

"You desire! You command!" says Sophie, flinging up her head. "What right have you to do either?"

"Right—what right?" stutters Sir Fell, convulsed with rage.

"Yes—what right? It is only tyrants who behave as you do, and you——"

"A tyrant! Do you dare to call me a tyrant?" He rises, he seems to tower over her.

"Sophie, *darling*," murmurs Nora, trembling, entreating. Sophie laughs almost fiercely.

"I do indeed," says she. "I was going to say, that *as* a tyrant you are——"

"Eh?" questions he.

"Eh?" repeats she.

"Go on!" thunders he. "Eh, what?"

"Well, A 1 then!" says she deliberately.

This little play upon words drives Sir Fell to the very limit of his bad temper.

"Leave the room, insolent girl," roars he, throwing out a tragic hand in the direction of the door. "Go, go! Before I do you an injury. You, *you* to dare to accost me like this—to—I am an A 1 Tyrant then, am I? I'll act up to your verdict, I warrant you. I——"

And then ensues a perfect storm of abuse, beneath which Nora goes down crushed; it is Nora who suffers most, though it is upon Sophie's rash head that it literally hails. Wild is the whirlwind that rages round her, and is still raging, when Nora at last draws her out of the room, and along the corridor to the old schoolroom where they can always be sure of being left in peace.

Sophie, once out of the room, has gone on before, and Nora, seeing that her head is slightly bent, feels sad at heart at the thought that this gay, bright, courageous companion has at last given way beneath the terrible scene that has just taken place.

"Sophie," says she, when she has closed and locked the old schoolroom door. "Sophie, darling, don't mind him" She feels as if she cannot bear to look at her poor face, which she knows must look like ashes, and considerably as she says this, stares out of the window. She is brought speedily back to reason—and Sophie—by a most suspicious sound from the latter. Sophie indeed is bursting with laughter.

"We're alive!" says she, placing her arms akimbo and *executing a pas seul* that would have made her fortune at *the Gaiety*. "Not a bone broken! Fancy that! What's

the matter with you, Noll? You look like a ghost. *Such a frightened little face!*"

"Oh! Sophie, all the things he said."

"There must have been a good many of them certainly," says Sophie, "considering the time it took him to shoot them all off. But I confess I didn't hear much of them. When his first firework went off, and I felt he was thoroughly wound up, I gave him a thousand and began to count (not quickly, you know, but calmly, to give him every chance), and to show you how thoroughly I understand him, I may tell you that I got to 980 before he began to run down, and you saw fit to eject me." Here she breaks into irrepressible laughter. "I thought he was going to *burst*," says she. "Didn't you? What a pity he *didn't*. Did you look at his face when I said A 1? I thought I should have burst then. His shirt was so white, and his face so highly coloured, that I could think of nothing but purple and fine linen."

"But this afternoon——"

"He will be too taken up with his Miss Baxter to think of me; and besides, we are to be represented, for her benefit, as the happy united family within whose bosom is everlasting peace."

"But there will be dinner after that, when they are gone. What will you do then?"

"Eat it," says Sophie.

At this Nora too laughs.

"Oh! I wish I had your courage," says she. "But I haven't. What a terrible person he is! Was there ever so domineering a man?"

"He is like love," says Sophie sweetly.

"Love! Like love! *Sophie!*"

"Well, isn't he? He 'rules the court, the camp, the grove,' or he would if he could at all events. But there is one thing he shan't rule, and that's *me!*"

Here they both laugh again, but softly, as if afraid of being overheard.

"And the Queen Anne silver, and the old Worcester! Those old cups and saucers that we are scarcely allowed to sneeze in the room with. Nora," grasping her arm; "it is beyond all dispute now. He means to marry her. It is *she* alone who could create in him a desire to put his best foot foremost,"

"She? Miss Baxter?"

"Miss Baxter beyond question. The, alas! '*Not impossible She.*' She is coming here to-day to inspect the premises—to see if it is worth her while to barter (one feels inclined to say baxter) her gold for his title."

"She will take the title," says Nora. "I feel it."

"How I should love to send in the kitchen cups and saucers," says Sophie, "and bread and butter as thick as your wrist. I suppose," hesitating, "that wouldn't do? But what a chance, Nolly. A chance of escape from a step-mother. It is worth thinking about."

"It isn't," says Nora drearily. "If you sent her her tea in *jam pots*, she'd be Lady Anketell in spite of them."

CHAPTER XXV.

"Tell me, my friends, why are we met here?"

It is all over, Miss Baxter has come, has gone, leaving consternation behind her. The best Worcester had been paraded, the ancient silver had shed a glow over the faded room, the cake had been a little less stale than might be expected of the local grocer, and the bread and butter had been unexceptionable.

Miss Baxter had partaken of all with a beaming smile upon her broad face, and a determination to take all things, even the girl's lukewarm attentions, in the very best spirit. She had praised the tea, and "tucked into the bread and butter" (as Sophie rather vulgarly remarked afterwards), and had wisely eschewed the choky seed-cake; and when, after a lengthened stroll round the dilapidated gardens with Sir Fell, she had returned to the house, it was to be presented to the girls as their future step-mother.

"Though of course I know I can't be your step-mother," said Miranda Baxter, "or any other sort of mother to you, as Sir Fell is not your father!"

"Mother! What a misnomer! Their sister rather," said Sir Fell, in his most delightful tone—the tone that makes the girls always long to fall upon him and smite him hip and thigh—radiant in the thought that he has now got a third fortune to squander. Poor Sir Fell! If ever he *was* worthy of pity, it is now!

"Well. I don't care how they take me, so long as they

will give me a welcome," said Miss Baxter, heartily. She held out her hand to Sophie, but she *looked* at Nora. Sophie took the hand, but Nora avoided the look.

"I say, you girls, I hope you will try to like me," said Miranda, in her loud, hard voice. "I'm English. I expect that will prevent you Irish from liking me, but——"

"Oh! *no!*" said Nora, softly, if a little haughtily.

"All that sort of thing is exploded," said Sophie. "We are half English ourselves, through we seldom confess it. We keep it as dark as we can. But I believe our great-grandfather was born in Warwick. Fearful thought! If you are coming to live with us, Miss Baxter, I hope you will like *us!* That will be much more to the purpose—for *us!*"

"Well—we shall see!" said Miranda Baxter. Then she had looked at Nora. "And you—what of you?" said she, in a loud, challenging sort of way.

"I hope you will be happy here," said Nora, coldly, with a little delicate smile, that died almost as it was born.

"Do you?" said Miranda. "Would your hope be stronger, if it had to do with my being happier elsewhere?" She laughed loudly as she said that, and in a queer sort of way took Nora's hand and pressed it. "You don't know me yet," said she.

Was that a threat? Sophie felt a little frightened. Sophie, who never was frightened for herself, felt now nervous about Nora. Why could not Nora have been a *little* bit civil? It cost so little to be civil, and if Miss Baxter was to come and live with them, civility beforehand would surely count. "You don't know me yet!" There was a sinister sound about those words. They might indeed mean anything.

She went away shortly after that, taking her friends, the Lacys, with her; and the girls, after suffering a long lecture from Sir Fell on the impropriety of their behaviour, escaped into the garden, where now, in the dying twilight, they wander up and down the old, sweet, mossy walks, their arms twined around each other.

"What did you think of her?" asks Sophie, presently, when they have discussed the calamity of having a step-mother *ad nauseam*.

"I thought her a little more vulgar than usual," says Nora.

"Well, I thought she quite shone beside Sir Fell," says Sophie. "*He* was vulgar, if you like!"

"You mean——?"

"The way he marched her about—showing her this, and that; and calling everything *old—so* old! That must have galled her whilst it attracted her. There is nothing so vulgar," says Sophie, decisively, "as to deliberately hurt the feelings of somebody else, and he hurt hers all along the line to-day. However," gaily, "she will pay him off for it, in the very *near* future! I feel sure of that, and the thought sustains me!"

"Yes, I noticed his hateful allusions to this old picture, and that old bit of brocade," says Nora.

"It isn't only people of low birth who are common and unclean," says Sophie. "Sir Fell belongs to the gutter, in my opinion."

"If so, they are well met," returns Nora, with a shrug.

"Probably. Still, the advantage is on her side. *She* is worth her weight in gold; whereas he——"

"Her weight! She is an heiress indeed at that rate!" says Nora. Whereupon they both give way to mirth, so keen, so happy, that it disperses to the four winds of heaven all their spleen.

Merry rings their laughter through the scented garden—so merrily indeed that it reaches the ears of old Daddledy, who, digging amongst and earthing his late cabbages, raises his head, and, seeing them, puts down his shovel and comes towards them.

"What are ye doin' there?" asks he, blinking his old eyes, and evidently on the look-out for mischief. "Pullin' the flowers off me apple-threes, no doubt, to decorate yer dinner table. No fegs! not whilst *I'm* here."

"Apple-blossoms! Why there isn't one worth looking at now," says Sophie. "Don't be stupid, Daddledy. Do you think we don't want the coming apples as well as you do? No—we are only walking about and talking."

"Faiks, ye *do* look idle!" says Daddledy, making the noble concession with a grim smile. "Smiles are so foreign to Daddledy's sour face, that when by chance he gives way to one, the consequences are awful."

"Oh! Daddledy, don't!" says Nora.

"An' what were ye talkin' about?" asks Daddledy, leaning on his shovel and regarding them with much acrimony.

"About Miss Baxter," says Sophie. "You were right, Daddledy. Sir Fell is going to marry her."

"*That* ould girl!" says Daddledy. He is silent awhile. He had certainly given his two young mistresses to understand that he thought Sir Fell *would* marry Miss Baxter, sooner or later; but now that his supposition is a *fait accompli*, his surprise, it appears, is beyond bounds. "Why, she's nigh as ould as himself," says he, "an' that's sayin' a lot. May the divil carry thim disthracted ould faymales."

"But, Daddledy," says Sophie, in an explanatory sort of way—"Miss Baxter has been asked by Sir Fell to marry him. It is quite right, quite reasonable. She——"

"Ye needn't go into it, me dear," says Daddledy. "I'm far from a fool, thank God. Marriage is honourable, I know, an' age is valuable—but, an ould maid is *abominable*!"

"Oh! If Miss Baxter could hear you!"

"I wouldn't care if she did, fegs. An ould maid she is, however it goes. But I don't envy her any way. Sir Fell's no joke. Was there iver the like of him?" demands Daddledy, suddenly standing square on the walk, and whacking his shovel against a neighbouring tree in a very access of passion. "He come here this mornin', an' says he—'Daddledy,' says he, 'Ye'll airth all thim cabbages before night-fall, or I'll know the rayson why,' says he."

"All those cabbages!" says Nora, looking at the long, long row to which the old man is pointing. "Why *no* one could do those in a day. Well, and what did you say, Daddledy?"

"Only one word to the point, me dear—but fegs, it scattered him. I said—'May the divil *airth* you soon!' An' faith, ye wouldn't have seen him goin'! Look here," says Daddledy, wildly brandishing his shovel over his old shoulder, "I've the worst opinion of him. I'm thinkin', thin, Miss——" Here Daddledy pauses, and regards the two girls with a small, but sparkling eye, and a slow wag of his frowzy head from side to side—"I'm thinkin' that if there was a warrant out agin the Divil, they'd have yer step-father up on suspicion!"

"Oh! Daddledy!" says Sophie, with mock horror. "And has it come to this? Don't you think you had better warn Miss Baxter of her future lord's iniquities? *Do*. It may save us from a——What will she be, Nora, a *step—step-mother*?"

1

"She's ould enough to know her own mind," says Daddledy grumpily, "an' common enough too. Fegs, I'll tell ye what," nodding at the girls with a withering air. "It's comin' down in the world ye are. What wid yer step-father marryin' with a thradesman's daughter, an' yer takin' tay wid ould Pether Kinsella! 'Pon me conscience I'd as soon see ye take tay wid mesilf."

"Well—why don't you ask us?" says Sophie, who delights in teasing him. "You have only to say the word, and Miss Nora and I will be with you in a twinkling of an eye. When shall it be, Daddledy? Name the day, the happy day! And who will you ask to meet us? Mr. Butler, for me; and who for Miss Nora? Mr. Carnegie?"

"Now there's a raal gintleman for you," says Daddledy, with a shrewd glance at Nora, who laughs at him. "He comes of a good lot. Not a bad dhrop in him. I remimber him well, when he was a bit of a gossoon wid a head like a yellow turnip."

"How pretty!" says Nora.

"I saw him afther that, many a time, whin he was a grown lad—an' fine he was to look at."

"We saw him too," says Sophie.

"Oh! but ye were babbies thin. Though the Launy knows," says Daddledy, piously addressing by this strange name the Powers that be—"ye haven't a grain more sinse now than ye had thin. Yer mother was alive thin."

"What kind was she, Daddledy?" asks Sophie eagerly—to whom, as well as to Nora, their mother is only a bare memory—slight, unsatisfactory.

"Wisha! A pore crature?" says Daddledy impartially. "The masther did what he liked wid her. Who but a pore crature would marry him."

"I don't think Miss Baxter is a 'poor crature,'" says Sophie, in a rather huffed tone.

"'Tis me prayer that she isn't," says Daddledy. "If she'd up wid her fist to him, 'twould be new life to me ould bones. An' maybe she will; thim low-born faymales can do a power. Yer pore mother was a lady, any way, an' didn't know how to manage him. Look how she left yer fortunes itself. Not a penny can ye touch without his consint."

"Until we are twenty-five," says Nora.

"Is that what ye think? Well, maybe—maybe," says the *old man* cautiously. "But I understood that if ye married

even *thin*, agin his wishes, the money would remain wid him."

"Oh, nonsense!" says Sophie. "You are dreaming. Never mind that," gaily—"Tell us about Mr. Carnegie. It's quite a comfort to get you on to *him*, Daddledy—he is the only person I ever knew you to talk of without virulent abuse. Go on. You know," mischievously, "that Miss Nora is longing to hear anything you can tell about him; little anecdotes about his teething, or his first running about will delight her."

"Is that the way?" says old Daddledy, with a second keen glance at Nora. Not that he is in the slightest degree taken in. To deceive an Irish peasant one would have to get up *so* early, that the exact hour has never yet been fixed. It remains a mystery. "I'm proud to hear it," says he. "Better a man, like Carnegie than a small, mane little boy, wid two minds!"

This is so open an allusion to Ferris, that Nora frowns. Sophie, coming to the rescue, treats it lightly, in spite of that dangerous touch about the "*two minds*."

"A man is better than a boy always," says she. "But was Mr. Carnegie ever small and mean? And used he to have 'two minds'? Travelling has probably improved him. He has been abroad a great deal, hasn't he?"

"All over the airth!" says Daddledy solemnly. "Here an' there, like——"

"Satan—or Sir Fell!" puts in Nora contemptuously.

"If ye're goin' to say me words for me," says Daddledy, deeply affronted, "I may as well go on wid me cabbages."

"No—no, Daddledy; don't go yet," says Sophie. "Tell us about Mr. Carnegie. So he has been a great traveller?"

"Not a bit o' the haythen world he hasn't throd under fut! so I'm tould. Better thread his own dacent land, say I; but young men will be quare."

"Quite a travelled youth!" says Nora, still contemptuously. and with a little curl of her lip.

"Quite," says Sophie. "Not only has he walked in and out of all the haythen countries, but he has ploughed the raging sea in all directions, and——"

"Arrah! be aisy wid yer nonsense," says Daddledy, interrupting her without ceremony—"sich talk!"

"Poetry, Daddledy—mere poetry."

"To the divil wid yer pothery," says Daddledy, now in a fine frenzy. "Give me common sinse! Arrah! who could plough the say? Tell me *that*, now, an' then I'll be spakin' to ye!"

"It has been done," says Sophie, mysteriously.

"Niver!" says Daddledy.

"Ask Mr. Carnegie! *He's* done it," says Sophie. "He has ploughed lots of seas. Special patent, no doubt; but beyond dispute it has been *done*."

"'Tis making fun o' me, ye are," says Daddledy wrathfully. Then, "Git along wid the two of ye. It's at me work I'd betther be, than wastin' me time on yer folly."

With this he walked away, plainly affronted, leaving the girls to laugh freely.

"What a cross old cat," says Sophie.

"I never know whether he likes us, or hates us," says Nora.

"Know it now. He *hates* us. He will betray us to Sir Fell, some day," says Sophie.

She might have grown even more eloquent on this subject, but for an interruption.

It comes in the shape of a head raised cautiously from behind a gooseberry bush on their right.

"Sophie!" says Mr. Butler in a careful tone.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"The blush is on the flower, and the bloom is on the tree,
And the bonnie, bonnie sweet birds are carolling their glee;
And the dews upon the grass are made diamonds by the sun,
All to deck a path of glory, for my own *Cáilin Donn*.
O; fair she is. O! rare she is! O! dearer still to me,
More welcome than the green leaf, to winter-stricken tree;
More welcome than the blossom, to the weary, dusty bee
Is the coming of my true love—my own *Cáilin Donn*."

"Good gracious, is that you?" cries Sophie, running behind the gooseberry bush, and hurling herself into his arms.

"I thought you were never coming this way," says Mr. Butler, accepting his armful with joy. "I've been hiding here for hours, as it seems to me, waiting for that old croaker to go away. Is that you, Nora?" seeing Nora standing in an uncertain way, as if hardly knowing whether to come on or go away, "Carnegie gave me a message for you."

"Yes?" says Nora coming up to him now at once and giving him her hand—glad at the chance of being allowed to stay and talk with him and Sophie.

"He heard you say you wanted a little rough terrier, and he's got one for you."

"Oh, no. I don't want it," says Nora quickly.

"Nonsense, Nolly. Of *course* you want it," says Sophie, "why you've been dying for one for months. How good of Mr. Carnegie."

"He's bringing it down, I think," says Butler.

"But," begins Nora, and then stops dead short. How can she explain to them that if she takes this little terrier, Ferris will be angry. How is she to explain it to *him*, and how explain to the others her fear of his anger? "He is very kind," says she, in a stifled tone.

"He's the best fellow I know," says Butler. "But I say, girls," with a sudden change of tone, "what of Sir Fell and Miss Baxter?"

"You have heard something then," says Sophie. "Let us supply the end. She has been here to-day. She has taken us to her heart. She has told us that she is about to become our step—step-mama!"

"Isn't it disgraceful of Sir Fell," says Nora. "Really he is worse than Henry VIII. And to marry *such* a woman."

"I suppose it will come off before Christmas," says Sophie.

"Christmas!" says Denis. "Is that all you know about it. It will come off before you have time to realize it. I met the Lacy girls just now, and Miss Baxter—getting back from your place. They were walking their pony up the hill, and I stopped to talk to them, and the lean one told me Miss Baxter is going to marry Sir Fell within a fortnight."

"A fortnight! But where? Here?"

"Not here—in London. And they are to be away for a week and come back here directly afterwards."

"Just in time for Lady Saggartmore's big ball," says Nora, with a rather tremulous little laugh. "So our doom is sealed?"

"It looks like it," says Butler gloomily. "What is she like, Sophie? Impossible, or the other thing?"

"Impossible!" says Sophie, with a gloom that puts his own into the shade. "We're done for. I feel that."

"She's tremendous in every way," says Nora. "She is on the gigantic scale, massive—solid as her own dollars."

"She'll be able to keep Sir Fell in order at any rate," says Sophie viciously, yet with a little laugh.

"And us, too, into the bargain," says Nora, whereon Sophie's laughter dies a sudden death. "If she joins in with Sir Fell *against* us, I don't know what is to become of us."

"Perhaps she will make things pleasanter," says Butler, but with little hope in his voice.

"Or unpleasant," says Sophie.

"You know more of her than I do," says he. "How would you describe her? What is she like, I mean?"

"She is what the servants call 'a little short in her manner,'" says Sophie, whereon they all, in spite of themselves—and a little sadly—laugh outright.

"The ball," says Nora. "I hope she won't interfere with that. Lady Saggartmore's small dances are well enough—but her big balls are so lovely. And we have been thinking already about our gowns, Sophie and I."

"Yes. I've looked into it," says Sophie, "and have come to the conclusion that, black—and black alone—will be our wear. Our income, as regulated by Sir Fell, is so limited, that to dream of white, would be madness. Even pink, or blue, are not admissible."

"I shall get white," says Nora desperately.

"You were always terribly rash," says Sophie—"to me remains the sense of all this family. You will get a white frock, and it will soil, and then—Where will you be then? Now I shall get a black—a *deadly* black—gown, and I shall wear it until it falls from me in graceful rags."

"I hope they *will* be graceful," says Nora. "Oh! no—I hate black. It is the emblem of unhappiness. The very thought of it makes me feel as if misery was approaching—as if—" she breaks off suddenly, and her pale little face grows paler. She is looking towards the far end of the path, and as Sophie's and Butler's eyes follow hers, they see Carnegie and Eusebius Brush coming towards them.

Under Carnegie's arm, is a little rough-haired Irish terrier, very purely bred.

"He's brought it!" says Butler, with interest in his tone.

"Oh! let us come and thank him," says Sophie enthusiastically.

"But, Sophie—I don't want it; I—— To be under an obligation! Sophie, *stop!*" cries Nora in an agony. "If I take it, he may——"

"Tut! Don't be so conceited," says Sophie. "If every man that ever gave a woman a dog wanted to marry her there would be considerably more bloodshed on earth than there has been yet, and that's saying a good deal. Here!" excitedly. "Come on! They can almost hear us now, and you *know* Eusebius! the least word is a mark for a jest."

"But——" still protests poor Nora, clinging to her sleeve.

"But me no buts," says Sophie. "For goodness' sake, Nora, pull yourself together and don't look like a dying duck in a thunder-storm."

"I didn't think you could be so unkind!" says Nora, in low, but thrilling accents. "I thought *you* would have stood by me at all events, you—who——Oh! How d'ye do, Mr. Carnegie?" with a sudden bright, if troubled, smile. "How d'ye do, Eusebius?"

"I'm as well as circumstances will admit," says Eusebius. "But that's not saying much."

"Oh! Mr. Carnegie, what a lovely little dog," says Sophie, putting out her hand to caress the little creature in his arms.

"I hope your sister will like him," says Carnegie, looking straight at Nora. "I have brought him to her. I heard her say the other day that she would like to have an Irish terrier."

"For me!" says Nora faintly. "How kind of you! And what a pretty dog!"

"He won't be always as small as he is now," says Carnegie, as if apologising. "I know some women like very small dogs, but——"

"I don't," says Nora; she has been looking at the little terrier pup all this time, who has been looking back at her with much purpose in his small, dark, clever eyes. "I know what an Irish terrier means very well. He will be *three* times that size when he is fully grown, and he will be rough and ugly, but beautiful. He will understand every word I say, and he will be devoted to me, and I——"

"Well," says Carnegie anxiously, "and you?"

"I shall be devoted to him," says Nora, vanquished by the little dog's appealing eyes, and his evident desire to get from Carnegie's arms into hers.

"You will accept him then?" says Carnegie quickly.

"Yes," returns Nora slowly, unwillingly. She holds out her arms to the dog and takes him. The terrier, after a moment, barks loudly, and looks back at Carnegie, and makes little plunges towards him, as though desirous to regain his former place.

"He likes you best," says Nora, then quickly: "Perhaps you had better take him back. He is happy with you."

"He will be happier with you, unless he is the most graceless dog in Christendom," says Carnegie. "There, now, see, he has taken to you at once."

And indeed the little thing has turned its small nose to Miss Carew, and is scrabbling and tearing at her as if in perfect unison with her.

"Has it a name?" asks Nora, cuddling the little terrier closer to her,

"No. I have left you to find the name."

"Still you might help me," says she.

"If I may," says he, delighted at the little kindly touch on her part. "What do you think of 'Creina'?"

It is a most unfortunate suggestion, "Nora Creina." Nora frowns.

"A hideous name," she says shortly. "It suggests that ridiculous poem of which unhappily my own name bears a part. No! *Anything* but that." She turns away from him, and gives her attention to Eusebius. "What brought you here to-day?" asks she.

"Yes, Eusebius, what?" asks Sophie gaily. "Who sent you here?"

Mr. Brush looks at her with a mournful air.

"Mamma!" says he, with beautiful simplicity. He sinks upon a crumbling garden seat, and slowly drawing a huge cabbage-leaf out of his straw hat, begins to fan himself laboriously.

"Eusebius! Throw that horrid thing away," cries Sophie. "The very smell of it is abominable."

"That sounds as if the look of it were worse still," says Eusebius, examining the huge, limp, flabby thing with care. "Yet it's a fine leaf, I assure you I chose it with but one

thought, its proportions attracted me. Well, here goes"—chucking it away—"but I say, give me some sort of a fan instead, or I'll melt from your gaze like a beautiful dream."

Here Nora breaking a branch off a laurel bush close by, gives it to him.

"This would take a prize," says he, "for perfume alone. It is of the deadly order; it suggests prussic acid. Look here, girls! Tell you something—my parent would take a prize too."

"For leanness?" says Sophie.

"No."

"For her back then! It is the youngest I ever saw for a woman of her age. See Aunt Maria's back only, and you might readily believe her a girl of sixteen."

"No, by Jove, it's not that either," says Eusebius lazily. "Though I confess her back is up. It's for her temper she'd take it. Her back is a fraud. Most young people—always excepting Nora and you—are famed for their sweetness and light, and all that sort of thing, but——"

"Oh, *get* out," says Butler.

"But," continues Eusebius unmoved and sighing deeply—so deeply that all his huge body seems to shake. "My mother's back's no good in that direction; and I can't forgive her for it."

"What has she done now?" asks Nora.

"You may well ask," says Eusebius. "Because it is all *you*. She's regularly on the champ, I can tell you."

"All me?" Nora has come nearer to him, and is regarding him with wide and haughty eyes—eyes that forbid him to say further. Perhaps he would not have hesitated over the haughtiness, but something in the knowledge that reaches him that the girl is *trembling*, stops his tongue; yet he would have liked to tell her all—to kill this mad passion for Ferris in her heart, and to kill it the more effectually by declaring his faithlessness before all these people—these friends assembled here. But seeing the girl standing before him, in her white gown, with her small hands clasped, and her frowning brows, and her defiance, and her horrible fear that he will speak—All this strikes him dumb.

"Oh! Only you, so far as that you are a pretty girl," says he. "And Mrs. Vancourt detests pretty girls, and my *mamma*"—*genially*—"detests Mrs. Vancourt; so when

the latter said something about you that my mamma"—pulling at his cigar—"disliked, there was an almighty row. She has sent me over here to-day to request that both you and Sophie when next you meet Mrs. Vancourt will look through her as though she were a ghost."

"What nonsense!" says Sophie.

"I shall certainly not do that," says Nora. "She must arrange her own quarrels and finish them all by herself."

"There will be murder, I think," says Eusebius complacently.

"If so, I hope Aunt Maria will murder Mrs. Vancourt," says Sophie. "I do hate that little French doll."

"She is very pretty," says Nora slowly, as if driven into saying it, "and she always dresses so well."

"Like all *Poupées*!" says Eusebius. "They don't sell, if they ain't well robed."

CHAPTER XXVII.

"I'll pull you sweet flowers, to wear, if you choose them,
Or, after you've kissed them, they'll lie on my bosom,
I'll fetch from the mountain its breeze to inspire you,
I'll fetch from my fancy a tale that won't tire you,
O! your step's like the rain to a summer-vexed farmer,
Or sabre or shield to a knight without armour,
I'll sing you sweet songs till the stars rise above me,
Then, wandering, I'll wish you, in silence, to love me."

NORA turns aside a little abruptly. She walks away a step or two, pretending to fondle the little dog within her arms, though her thoughts are far from him, and presently finds herself listening to Carnegie. So full are her thoughts of other things that his voice seems to come to her from quite a long way off.

"You have made a conquest of that little beast," says he.

"Yes. He seems to like me," says Nora, lifting her pathetic face to his. "How strange, though—to like me so suddenly I mean. Love at first sight illustrated," she laughs, but rather forlornly—Eusebius' talk about Mrs. Vancourt has taken all the spirit out of her—"I don't believe in that, do you? I feel sure he will go over to Sophie presently."

"Why?"

"Because—I don't know. I," with a little quick sigh,

"I am not like Sophie. People may like me for an hour, or a day, but Sophie they like for months and years."

"Your sister is a person very much to be admired," says Carnegie slowly. "But your sister is not you."

"No, just as I have said," put in Nora, nervously. With her doubts, her suspicions, of Carnegie's admiration for her, what madness it was on her part to bring up such a discussion, but she had not thought of it when she began, she had thought only of the sorrow that is blighting her own young life.

"No, you have not said it," says Carnegie. "If your sister is to be admired for months and years, *you* are to be loved—for ever!"

"You are very kind," says Nora, in a voice that is scarcely audible and with a hopeless attempt at a smile.

Carnegie is silent. As a fact, speech is beyond him. His whole soul is lost in the knowledge that he loves her. Loves this small, fragile, cold, beautiful little girl who is standing beside him, with no more thought of him in her heart than if he had never existed.

It seems terrible to him that he should so love her—this indifferent, sweet, little thing—this girl, who thinks as lightly of him as though he were the merest passing acquaintance; *he*, to whom her lightest desire would be as law; he, who loves her and longs for her, as never yet he thought he could long for anything.

Had he ever really longed for anything before? He had *wished* for this thing or for that, but had he ever set his heart upon the gaining of anything? Everything, up to this, indeed, had come so easily, so lightly; there had been so little difficulty about the obtaining of anything he desired, that he had scarcely desired it. That was the reason, perhaps, that he had never really cared; but *now* he cares—now, when love has at last caught him between its wings, he flings his whole soul into the pursuit of the thing beloved—and a very honest soul it is.

"I am not kind," says he at last. His voice is so different from his usual one, that involuntarily the girl looks up at him. She is sorry a moment later that she looked. His eyes are full of a meaning that almost frightens her, so intense it is—but even more than it frightens her, it repels.

"Kind or not," says she distinctly, though her heart has begun to beat with uncomfortable haste, "I must ask you not to speak to me like that again."

She moves back to the others quietly, but with a decision that forbids further speech on his part, and goes to Sophie, who is laughing gaily with Butler and Eusebius over little or nothing. Mr. Carnegie follows her—with a rather frowning brow; indeed she had not permitted him to remain behind; she had made a little imperious movement to him to accompany her, that told him she declined to let the others have cause for thought about her in her relations with him. It was a haughty little gesture, but he had not dared to disobey it, even though he chafed under the obedience.

"What are you laughing at, you two?" asks Nora, with a little strained smile at the small merry group, as she approaches them.

"Oh, *such* a story," says Sophie. "Eusebius has been telling it to us. About Aunt Maria and——"

Here she stops dead short, and, indeed, they all turn with one consent in one direction. It is the direction from which a most remarkable sound has come apparently through a gooseberry bush.

"Sth—sth!"

"Good Heavens! What's *that*?" says Sophie.

"It's Daddledy," says Nora.

"*No!*" says Sophie, which explosive now-a-days always means anything but what it seems to mean.

But Daddledy it is!

"Miss Sophie, Miss Sophie!" says he, sticking his old frowsy head through the branches of the gooseberry bush. "*Himself's comin'!*"

"Oh! Denis, go—go at once!" cries Sophie. "If he finds you here, I am lost. Mr. Carnegie and Eusebius can remain, but—I am afraid, Mr. Carnegie," turning to him with an irrepressible but very nervous laugh—"that we must let you into our little secrets. As I think I explained to you before, Sir Fell has—has——"

"Failed to discover the attractions of our dear Denis," says Eusebius. "Now then, Butler, I can hear the arch fiend's step crunching round the corner. The cloven hoof is always unmistakable. Are you going, or are you prepared for instant annihilation?"

"Oh; Denis, *do* go—if only for *my* sake," says Sophie, *in an agony.*

"*Misther* Butler, dear, run," says Daddledy, and as

Butler is pushed by Sophie into the upper walk that will take him to the convenient breach in the wall by which he entered, the old man's anxiety gets the better of him. "Run, sir! Run, ye divil!" says he in great excitement.

Butler is perhaps Daddledy's one delight. Is he not of good "ould family—raal ould stock?" Has he not often squeezed the welcome coin into his horny hand? Has he not always been the "raal gintleman" all through? And isn't he an honest lover into the bargain?

"O, Love is the soul of a neat Irishman,"

says an old writer, and probably he knew. At all events, Daddledy, who has scorned love throughout his life, feels a distinct admiration for Denis in his character as lover. He has an equal detestation for Cyril Ferris, whose gauge he has taken to an inch, as only an Irish peasant can—without knowledge, without hint, and merely on sight.

As the old man wheezes out his exclamation to Butler, all the others laugh. Sophie alone shrugs her shoulders, yet she turns a grateful glance on Daddledy. ("I'll give him something—something nice—if it costs me my last penny," is her thought.)

"Thank you," says she out loud to the old man, who receives her gratitude with a grumpy air and trots back to his earthing.

"If you are all going to wait to see Sir Fell, I'm not," says Sophie, with a distinctly vicious air, whereupon she marches forward and presently disappears from view.

"Beauty in distress," says Eusebius. "Carnegie, it grows late; are you coming my way?"

"Yes. Good-bye, Miss Carew." He holds Nora's hand for a prolonged moment, anxiously hoping for a sign of friendliness from her, but Nora keeps her eyes steadfastly fastened on the ground. The only grain of comfort he takes away with him is the remembrance of how she still holds the little terrier fondly enclosed within her arms. She has accepted him; she even seems to love him.

Nora, left alone, moves wearily homewards. Sir Fell, after all, had not come that way, being mercifully smitten with a desire to see what work old Daddledy had done amongst the late row of cabbages; had he earthed them? *Sir Fell* requires as much work of Daddledy as though he

were a young man of twenty, whilst giving him only half a man's wages all the time.

As Nora, still hugging the little dog to her bosom, reaches the small iron gate that leads from the orchard to the flower-garden, a voice comes to her that makes her heart stand still.

It is Cyril's voice, and comes to her from behind a quick-set hedge that grows on one side of the path that leads to this gate. From behind this hedge one could see, but not hear, all that had been going on near the gooseberry bushes.

"Nora!" says Ferris. His tone is sharp—angry.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"O! the watcher longs for morning
And the infant cries for light,"
And the saint for Heaven's warning.
And the vanquished pray for might,
But their prayer when lowest kneeling
And their supppliance most true
Are cold to the appealing
Of this longing heart to you."

"You! Is it you?" cries Nora, in a subdued tone, yet one replete with amazed delight. So heartily glad a tone, indeed, that any man but the one in question would have received it at its own worth.

"Yes," says Ferris.

"Oh, don't stir—don't come out," cries Nora vehemently.

"Sir Fell is somewhere in the garden, and he is *sure* to be here presently, just because it is the last place in which he is wanted."

"Well, he can come as soon as he likes," says Ferris, preparing to push his way through the hedge.

"Oh, Cyril—but if he finds you—he will be so angry with me."

"Why should he be angry?"

"I don't know," miserably. Only you know he would, and besides," desperately, "he would talk about us, and——"

Heaven alone knows what terrible grief it is to her to say this—to even *hint* at this—but she faces it bravely.

"Well," says he, coldly, "And——"

"And I thought it might be bad for you," says she.

"Your people—you told me once they wished you to marry some girl with money, and I have no money, and if they heard——"

She breaks down, her pretty lips are quivering. Her whole thought is of him, she does not spare even one for herself, yet certainly the knowledge that she would be despised by his people, and regarded in the light of a pauper, must, in a measure, have added to the anguish of the situation.

"Oh, I daresay they *will* hear sooner or later," says Ferris, to whom "his people" are more or less imaginary. "No doubt they'll throw me over when they do. But I'm not thinking of them now. I'm thinking of myself. I tell you," savagely, "I'm *tired* of all this sort of thing, of hiding here and waiting there."

"I am sorry," begins Nora, who has grown very pale.

"Sorry, so am I. More sorry than I can tell you. Here have I been sitting here for a full half-hour, watching that fellow Carnegie making love to you, whilst you received his advances with smiling eyes."

"I received no advances," says Nora, compelling her white lips to speak.

"No? You did not receive that little brute in your arms, I suppose?"

"This—this little dog?" says she. "He brought it to me. I—I assure you, Cyril, I didn't want to have it, but Sophie urged me to have it—and——"

"The woman persuaded me and I did eat," quotes he bitterly. "It is always the same old story, one does what one wants to do."

"You can misjudge me if you will," says she, drawing back a step or two, "but," haughtily, "nothing you or anyone can say, can destroy the truth of my statement."

"Ah, it is so easy to say that," says he. "Words! what are they? Mere sound really."

"Am I to understand by that," asks she, her nostrils dilating, her slight breast rising and falling tumultuously, "that you believe I am not speaking the truth?"

So stern are the lovely, earnest eyes directed upon him, that Ferris goes down before them.

"Of course I believe you," says he, in a mumbling sort of way. "But you think only of yourself—you think

nothing of the torturing thirty minutes I have spent here, seeing that idiot making love to you."

"How can I help it?" says Nora miserably, giving herself away a little.

"Ah, you confess it then. You encourage him no doubt."

"No, no, no."

"Yes, you do. Though what the deuce you can see in him," with a disgusted frown, "is more than I can imagine."

"I don't want you to imagine it," says Nora coldly. She feels crushed to the very soul.

"Don't you?" with a sneer.

"No," calmly. It is, however, the calm before the storm.

"A fellow all talk and clothes," continues Ferris aggressively, "got ten pockets to every one that any other fellow has. I hate that kind of thing."

"I think he always looks very well dressed," says Nora calmly.

"No doubt you think perfection." He pauses, and then : "So you deliberately support Carnegie?" says he, in a slow but inwardly raging tone.

"Why do you talk to me like that?" says she. "Why should I support anyone, why should I *think* of anyone but you?"

"You say that—yet you left me to stifle behind this hedge, whilst you——"

"Don't say it again," says she imperiously. "If you were stifling, why did you stay behind this hedge, why did you not come forward and join us?"

Ferris hesitates before this question. Why, indeed? How explain to her that he had meant to seek her—*alone*. Her—without witnesses. When he had seen her from his vantage ground, surrounded by Sophie and Butler and Carnegie and Eusebius, his mean soul had shrunk from letting his body come forward, lest his visit to the girl he loves in his half-hearted way, should be reported to the woman he loves for her money only.

A happy thought strikes him as he struggles for an answer to her question.

"How could I come forward," says he. "*I*, who had *been watching Carnegie's attentions to you. You can say what you like, Nora, but he is in love with you.*"

"Oh, I *hope* not," says Nora very sadly.

"You may hope as you like," says he furiously, his temper once again getting the better of him. "I expect you will tell me next that that little brute under your arm was not given to you as a mark of affection from him."

"We have discussed all that before," says Nora slowly. "Why go into it again? You know how this dog is mine. I do not disguise from you that I like the little thing, but I certainly—as you well know—do not like Mr. Carnegie, except as one likes a most ordinary acquaintance. I *like* him, but there is——" she pauses, and looks straight at Ferris, with her eyes wide and full of love, and her lips parted in a charming smile. "There is only one person in all the wide, big world whom I love," she holds out one hand to him, smiling divinely, "that one is *you*," says she.

Ferris catches her hand and presses it to his heart. This is but a preliminary. Presently he has taken her into his arms.

"Nora, forgive me," says he. "I say things hard to forgive, but surely it is my love for you alone that drives me to it. And now, just now, when I must leave you, I cannot bear to think that you will be——"

"Leave me?" She presses him back from her, and looks into his face with frightened eyes.

"For a fortnight only—or three weeks at the latest. I start to-morrow, but I shall certainly be back for Lady Saggartmore's ball. But, Nora, you will remember me all the time. You will think of no one else all the time I am away? *Speak*, Nora?"

"You know it," says she, clinging to him. "Cyril, you *will* be back then?"

"Beyond all doubt. Do you?" passionately, "think I could keep away?"

"And—you love me—*me* only?"

"Nora! Nora! Who is there under Heaven who could be compared with you?"

So they part.

CHAPTER XXIX.

“Methinks tha there are passions
Within that heaving breast.”

SIR FELL's third wedding-day has come and gone. The engagement had lasted only a week—the honeymoon five days. The new Lady Anketell had evidently been in a hurry to return home, and take up her position as the “lady of a Baronet,” as, I regret to say, she expressed it; and to make certain changes and improvements in the beautiful, but gaunt old house that now calls her mistress.

The marriage had taken place in Dublin, and had been strictly private. Even Nora and Sophie had not been invited to it—much to Sophie's disgust at all events—who liked excitement of any sort. Miss Baxter had felt disgust at the quietness of the affair too, but had sensibly assured herself that, as this was the last time her future husband should measure his will with hers with any chance of victory, it was better to let things go as he ordained. To be Lady Anketell was her one desire, and to compass that, was even worth giving in to the tyrant man for once in her life at all events.

The girls had enjoyed their five days of liberty more than they could say. No doubt Cyril's being away made them a little blank to Nora, but with the sense of loneliness that went with his absence, was a blessed sense also of freedom from that most cursed of all torments—jealousy. If not with her, he was also not with Mrs. Vancourt, who still remained on at Saggart. And his letters to Nora were constant enough—and if careful—well she never saw that they *were* careful, poor child!

It would be superfluous to say that Mr. Butler spent all his mornings and the best half of his evenings at Dunmore. And he and Sophie were more than good to Nora. They would not let her think herself *de trop*. They took her on their excursions through the shady woods, and by the banks of Saggart river, and in fact wherever they roamed all over the lovely neighbourhood. Sophie felt that Nora's heart,

was sad, and to leave her alone to brood over her sorrows seemed both to her and her Denis, well—"a *mean* sort of thing to do."

Then came the return of the newly-married pair, and the excitement ensuing upon it. An excitement that grew daily after their return.

" When Greek meets Greek,
Then comes the tug of war ! "

And from the very first it was plain to all beholders that there would be a tussle for supremacy between Sir Fell and his new bride. Nora and Sophie looked on with a keen and most pardonable curiosity, and when the third day had dawned, if betting had been one of their accomplishments, they would have freely laid on the late Miss Baxter.

There had been a slight skirmish between the bride and bridegroom on their arrival. It took place in the hall, and was witnessed by the servants and the two girls, who (the latter) had of course hurried down to greet them, though with very uneasy hearts. The skirmish was short but decisive, slight but very significant—and Miranda had been the victor !

She had carried her point, and that in a high-handed, loud and cheerful fashion that spoke volumes for her success in the future. It was plain she could keep her temper under difficulties ; and the one who can do that, has already won half the battle. Sir Fell had fumed, had protested, and finally had flung himself into his library, slamming the door behind him. He had, however, reappeared in time for dinner with as smiling a countenance as Nature (who had been most generous with the vinegar at his conception) would allow, and the first evening had passed off agreeably enough.

But it is on this, the fourth evening, that the great row royal occurs.

Dinner is over, dessert is on the table. A very different dessert from the old days, and a dessert plainly disapproved of by Sir Fell. He has, indeed, during all these past four days, been muttering objections to this and that little extravagance, all without result. The eight-o'clock dinner upon which Lady Anketell has insisted, and the comfortable two-o'clock luncheon, have all been abominations to him, as *meaning* the spending of so much more money.

But Miranda has listened to the mutterings, and in her loud, carry-all-before-it manner, has declined to be biassed by them. She has had her large fortune carefully settled on herself to the last penny, and can now afford to defy Sir Fell in safety. To do her justice, I think she would have preferred *not* to defy him, but haxing managed herself and her affairs with much *aplomb* all her life, it seems to her absurd—nay impossible—to truckle under to any one now. Generous at soul, she would have all things decent and in order wheresoever she sojourns, and Sir Fell's petty meannesses, and his desires to pare there and scrape here, are as abominations in her sight.

"Well, girls," says she now, cheerily. "What about your get-up for this ball of Lady Saggartmore's?"

As I have said, dessert is on the table, and the servants have withdrawn. Both Nora and Sophie look up quickly, as if surprised, as indeed they are. All these past four days they have been slowly learning that Miranda, however terrible in many ways, however hopelessly vulgar and impossible, is evidently bent on being civil to *them*. But this leading question—What does it mean?

"Our—frocks?" questions Sophie.

"Just so," says Miranda unabashed. "Or skirts or gowns, or costumes, whatever you like to call them. What are they?"

"We have two white muslins," says Sophie, who had abandoned the idea of black after all.

"New?"

"Well—not altogether," says Sophie placidly.

"I know what that means," says Miranda briskly. "You needn't explain further. Washed half-a-dozen times and gone in the seams. Not for me, thank you."

"But," begins Nora.

"Not another word!" says Miranda, raising a gigantic hand, literally covered with rings of the gaudiest description. "Look here, *I'm* going to take you to Lady Saggartmore's—it will be your first appearance in public with me, and you must leave it to me to fig you out properly."

Here Sir Fell, who has been wriggling in his chair for the past few minutes, breaks into the conversation, which threatens to grow embarrassing.

"I must beg you to believe, Miranda, that both Nora and

Sophie have always been considered well-dressed wherever they went in this county."

"Who told you?" asks Miranda, with dangerous curiosity.

"I have been given to understand it. I have seen for myself. I have no doubt at all that the gowns of which Sophie speaks are all they ought to be."

"Haven't you? I have," says Miranda quite pleasantly.

"You don't—ahem! you don't then choose to take my word for it?"

"Not much I don't!" cheerfully. "What *man* ever understood how a girl should be dressed unless he was in love with her. And a muslin that has been through the tub six times——"

"Sophia," demands Sir Fell angrily. "Is that the truth?"

"N—ot the whole truth!" says Sophie with gentle hesitation, who is beginning to enjoy herself immensely.

"I thought so," triumphantly. "Now you will be so good as to tell Lady Anketell—as she chooses to disbelieve me—*how* many times your evening frocks have been washed."

"Seven times!" says Sophie meekly.

"Sophia," begins Sir Fell furiously, but his fury is drowned in his new wife's resounding laugh.

"Ha, ha, ha!" cries she. "You see I understand more than you think. These girls must have new gowns for this ball. I want them to be a credit to me. Now, girls, what do you say to white silk under-skirts—cream-colour, you know—and white net over them? Very tasty, eh?"

"White silk! For girls so young! Ridiculous. Preposterous!" says Sir Fell, whose mean soul grows wroth at the idea of the spending of so much money. "I forbid it—once for all I forbid it."

"Nonsense!" says Miranda gaily. "*Who* are you going to forbid? Not me, for one. Would you like white silk, girls—covered as I say?"

"I—," begins Nora stammering, who is watching Sir Fell's lowering face and is frightened. It seems terrible too, to be so altogether dependent upon this new Lady Anketell—this complete and very vulgar stranger—but for all that, there rises in her mind the vision of herself gowned decently for the first time in all her life. Entering that lovely

ball-room at Saggartmore in a gleaming delicate robe—able to hold up her head with the best of them, and without that wasting, worrying determination to try and think she is not the shabbiest girl in the room—Oh! the joy of it. Why, even Mrs. Vancourt would not be better dressed, perhaps, and Cyril—Cyril, who had *never* seen her except in old or dingy clothes—what would Cyril think?

Sophie, however, has not let thought deprive her of speech.

"I have," says she solemnly, gazing at Lady Anketell, "I have all my life had one desire and that was for a white silk dress covered with something soft."

"Good!" says Miranda, clapping her huge hands. "Consider it yours."

"What is the meaning of this extravagance?" exclaims Sir Fell. "Would you put these girls *beside* themselves! Far better spend your money on this house—this house that you can see is going to rack and ruin, than foster the vanity of a pair of worthless girls."

"What's the row?" asks Miranda, whose temper is unimpaired.

"I won't have the girls pranked out like that, I tell you. When you married me—" He pauses—some last sense of shame perhaps holding him back.

"Well?" asks Miranda, who is calmly and with evident enjoyment digging a strawberry into crushed sugar with a view to consuming it. "'When you married me'? Now, *do* keep your temper—*do* be patient, and let's hear all about it."

Now to tell a person to be patient is only to make him impatient. Sir Fell uprears himself.

"When I married you," says he, his aristocratic nose taking a still more downward curve, "I certainly expected you would lay out your money on the house and grounds, and help me to pay off existing debts."

"Quite so," says Miranda, swallowing her strawberry. "I didn't expect you would put it into words, but I quite acknowledge where my existing debt comes in. You think me common I know," says she with a straight look at him that brings a dark red to his cheek, "but I should think the commonest thing out would be to tell a woman whose money you were *glad* to get, that you had married her *for* that money. Such things are understood not spoken.

However, that's neither here nor there, and," with quite a friendly air, "it will save trouble, if I say at once that I am going to do just what I like *with* my money. See? You make up your level mind to *that*. I'll see about the house and grounds and the debts by degrees, and when it suits me—but I'm not going to be brought to account for every penny I choose to spend. And I'm not going either, to take the girls round the county with me, looking like dowdies, whilst *I'm* clad in purple and fine linen. *I* don't want to be called a bad stepmother or any other names."

"Thinking of yourself, as usual," sneers he.

"I'm only thinking that the girls would like new frocks," says she bluntly. "And as for you. What do you think of? Of *No. 1*, if *I* know you, and Miranda Baxter is seldom at fault."

As she says this she squares her large shoulders, and looks as though she were making ready for battle at any moment.

Nora makes a little imperative terrified gesture to Sophie; against all rules she would have risen and left the room if Sophie would have come with her. But Sophie is anxious for the *dénouement*! And Sir Fell, white with rage, is just about to speak.

CHAPTER XXX.

"O glorious songs,
That rouse the brave 'gainst tyrant wrongs,
Resounding near and far.

Mingled with trumpet, and with drum,
Your spirit-stirring summons come."

"I must request, Miranda!" begins Sir Fell, with his most pompous air, but yet with a rage so strong that, though he does his best to suppress it, it absolutely *shakes* him. Indeed, as he leans his knuckles on the table-cloth—(he is standing)—to steady himself, they shew out white, so fierce is the pressure on them. "I must request, Miranda—that if you respect nothing else—neither modesty nor good manners—nor decent behaviour, that you will respect the fact that—whatever you were before"—(with withering accents)—"You are now *my wife*!"

"Thank you, for nothing!" says Miranda; now mildly incensed, but still far from downright anger of any sort.

"*My wife*!" repeats Sir Fell—as though this is his

sounding board—the one thing likely to bring her to a proper frame of mind. “You have a position to uphold in this county. I shall expect you to so demean yourself that, *if possible*,” bitterly—“people will respect and honour you.”

“Why, that is just what I desire myself,” says Miranda, blandly. “They shall see what an excellent friend I am going to be to these poor orphaned girls!”

“They have existed without you for a considerable number of years,” says Sir Fell icily. “They would probably have continued to do so had they never seen you. But I am not bringing them into this discussion; and I think”—with a glance full of hatred at the girls, who have been for the past three minutes very eager to get away—“that they would have shown some small sign of delicacy, had they withdrawn before this painful scene began.”

“Oh! can we go?” cries Nora, starting to her feet.

“Oh—thank you,” says Sophie, making, rather reluctantly however, for the door.

“No—don’t go,” says Miranda loudly. “Stop here, girls. What?”—turning to Sir Fell—“Are you ashamed of anything you are going to say?”

“Certainly not,” frowning. “Nora! Sophie! As Lady Anketell has chosen to put the matter in this light, I now command you to remain, and hear the justice of this case.”

“But——” begins Sophie fractiously.

“Sit down. Do you hear?” says Sir Fell, in a low tone, but savagely; whereupon the girls, very unwillingly, return to their seats.

“You will remember that we did not wish to remain,” says Sophie, letting her eyes rest defiantly upon Sir Fell. So replete with rage is the glance she receives in return, however, that she is glad to let her eyes sink once more upon her plate, where the strawberries lie untouched. As for Nora—she is pale, trembling, thoroughly unnerved.

“Well?” says Miranda, nodding to Sir Fell to go on. “We are waiting.”

“I was going to say——” says Sir Fell; the veins in whose forehead are now swelled out, and whose mouth is white, and his nostrils dilated—“And as you have desired the *attention* of the girls, I beg they will listen to me! that, as *I have married* you—you, who were of no family whatso-

ever—and have given you a good old name—I shall require at your hands that you will respect that name, and try, at all events,” (this most offensively), “to live up to it!”

There is a slight pause—the very slightest in the world, and then——

“Oh! go to the deuce!” says Miranda.

An awful—a grisly silence, follows upon this.

The girls sit as still and silent as if frozen to their chairs. As for Sir Fell, who shall measure the depth of his righteous rage. That he—~~he~~—who has successfully tyrannized over two well-born, irreproachable wives—should now be told by a third—who has not the smallest pretensions to family of any sort—“to go to the deuce!” is hardly to be believed.

Nora, shivering with horrible anticipation of an outbreak on the part of Sir Fell, sits motionless—with pale face bent over her plate. Sophie is almost as unhappy, for she is struggling with an agonised knowledge that soon—very soon—she is going to give way to a wild burst of laughter.

The deadly quiet penetrates at last even to Miranda’s phlegmatic breast. Up to this she has noticed nothing; and if she has thought at all, only to wonder why Sir Fell has not gone on with his “rubbishing remarks about his mouldy old family”—this is how she would have put it. To Miranda, to tell a person to “go to the deuce!” means really little or nothing. It is a mere figure of speech—and means merely — “*Do* have some common sense.” Now, amazed at the absence of all sound, she looks up from a hearty enjoyment of her second help of strawberries, to cast wondering eyes round the table.

Those eyes catch Sophie’s, which are now suffused with tears, through their owner’s desperate efforts to conceal the mirth that is now rapidly conquering her.

“What’s the matter with you?” says Miranda, staring at her. “If you want to laugh, why don’t you do it?”

Why, indeed? The new Lady Anketell demands an answer to this sensible query with distinct curiosity, and it proves the finishing touch to Sophie’s already overwrought strength. It is more than she can endure. Her pretty lips part, and, to Nora’s horror, a mad, soft ripple of *laughter breaks from her*,

It is infectious. Miranda, catching all at once (and for the first time) the comical side of the matter, begins to laugh too, her loud, awful laugh, that makes the rafters shake, and that always brings Sir Fell to the verge of cursing.

Altogether the situation is frightful! Miranda shouting at the top of the table, Sophie in fits of laughter at the side—Sir Fell at the end, regarding them both with a stony eye; and Nora petrified, staring at Sophie from the seat opposite to her.

Sir F. I., in a lucid interval, has marked Nora's horror; and has soothed his soul with the thought that, at all events, *one* is on his side—but there is worse still to come!

Nora is indeed petrified—such insubordination has reduced her to a state of terror hardly to be described. Sitting there, however, staring, as I have said, at her reckless sister, she feels all suddenly that something is going wrong with the muscles of her mouth. Apparently they are giving way. She makes an effort to pull herself together—to defy this new sensation—to avoid the common destruction that is so surely falling upon these two frivolous lunatics before her—but in vain! To her horror she finds, all at once—that she is laughing too! Laughing—not secretly—but distinctly—positively—frantically.

“Ha—ha—ha!” laughs Miranda. “That’s right, girls. There’s nothing like a good laugh; and I declare I haven’t had one for over a month. I say,” addressing Sir Fell—“Why don’t you join in—eh? Do you a lot of good. Ha!—ha! Take the starch out of you!”

This is too much. Sir Fell, with a muffled execration, rises from the seat into which he had fallen as if palsied, and with much dignity, and a stride that would have worked wonders on the stage, quits the room.

“Oh! Miranda,” cries Sophie—her untoward mirth suddenly checked. She looks at Lady Anketell, trembling; and it is noticeable that she has called her for the first time by her Christian name. Are they not now companions in misfortune?—and misfortune makes more links than its happier brother. “What have you done? He will never forgive us—never. He *will* be angry!”

“Let him!” says Miranda, with a fine courage.

“But he will visit all this upon you later,” says Nora, who has now forgotten her own bad case in thinking of

Miranda's—"you don't know him as well as we do. He," nervously, in a low tone, and with an anxious glance at the door. "He is very vindictive."

But all these warnings are plainly wasted on Miranda.

"Look here!" says she cheerfully. "If you two girls are afraid of any man living—*I'm not!* I defy any man born (or woman either for the matter of that) to frighten *me*. I'm usually all there! And take my word for it, Sir Fell will get over this."

"If not on you," says Sophie, who, now her burst of ill advised merriment is at an end is beginning to quake—"He will certainly visit it upon *us*, and make it very unpleasant for us too."

"I'll see to that!" says Miranda, who in truth seems very capable. Her whole air restores courage to them, and they now regard her with an altered vision—one that is full of hope and belief.

"Sit down, girls, and finish your strawberries," says Miranda encouragingly, "they're first-rate. Good as if they came out of Covent Garden."

"I couldn't eat anything," says Nora, whose heart is still in her mouth.

"Tut!" says Miranda, contemptuously but kindly. "There is nothing on earth good enough—or bad enough—to destroy the flavour of one's food. And as for Sir Fell—Look here! I'm open to a bet that he'll never say another word about this affair. Why," throwing out her hands expansively, "what did it all come to? I only told him to shut up! Fact is, girls, I can't have that 'fine old name' of his, put down my throat on all occasions. I've given him my fine new money in exchange for it, and as *I* look at it that makes us quits."

She glances round, first at one girl—then at the other, but though both are dying to speak, they hesitate a little too long.

"I see you don't agree with me," says Miranda at last—not in the least ill-naturedly, but perhaps with a touch of disappointment. This touch fires the mine.

"Miranda!" says Sophie, solemnly. "Don't mistake me. So far as *I'm* concerned, I think you are a thousand times too good for Sir Fell."

"Ah!" says Miranda; her large countenance shines, she smiles upon Sophie with a very honest delight, but then

suddenly turns back to Nora. Nora has not spoken—*will* Nora speak? Strange as it may seem, Miranda's heart has turned from the beginning, not to the merry Sophie, but to the self-contained and somewhat repellant Nora!

As she looks at her, Nora rises, pauses a second, and then runs to her and throws her slender arms around her neck.

"Oh, I am *glad* you have come to live with us," says she.

It is a complete victory! Miranda clasping the girl to her ample bosom whilst holding out a hand to Sophie (who too embraces her), vows to do her very best for the happiness of these two pretty creatures who have been thrown thus into her life.

* * * * *

Miranda had told the girls that she thought Sir Fell would make no further allusion to the disturbance of the evening, and subsequent events prove her right. To the astonishment of Nora and Sophie, Sir Fell takes no further notice of the indignities from which he suffered on that occasion, and is if possible rather more polite than usual to them all, next morning.

Miranda—if distinctly vulgar—is decidedly an acquisition. Indeed from this time forth a change for the better is recognizable in Sir Fell; a change on the surface only, no doubt, but still to be welcomed. Miranda's robust personality pervading the house as it does from basement to garret seems to dwarf his, and her imperturbable good humour belittles hopelessly his bursts of petty temper.

On the whole the girls begin to look on the advent of the new Lady Anketell as a turn for the better in their fortunes, and apart from that more selfish consideration of her, they both, though shyly at first, grow to love her for her own sake, more and more day by day!

CHAPTER XXXI.

"Oh! the blossoms are fading
And falling away,
For the summer is gone
And they haste to decay,
And this heart since the sunshine
It bloomed in hath fled,
Must soon like the flowers
Lie withered and dead."

"THIS is the seventh dance," says Lord Saggartmore, pausing beside his handsome wife to point out Ferris to her, who is Mrs. Vancourt's partner. "And still he has not asked Nora to dance."

"Nora? No," says Lady Saggartmore, her kindly face growing grave. "I fear there is something wrong there, yet at one time, I certainly thought he was in love with her."

"Well, he looks as if he were in love with Mrs. Vancourt now," says Saggartmore, a big, burly man with light hair and eyes.

"If I had thought—if I had imagined she was going to interfere with Nora's happiness, I should not have asked her here," says Lady Saggartmore with a frown, that sits but ill upon her large, fair, beautiful face.

"Perhaps your having asked her here is the kindest thing you have ever done for Nora," returns her husband, with a lifting of his brows.

"Oh! *That* from you. As if *I* ever wanted Cyril here," says she. "You know I have always rather disliked him than otherwise."

"He's not a bad fellow when all is told," says Saggartmore, in a rather apologetic tone. "And he can shoot, which is more than one can say of all one's acquaintances. But as a lover I shouldn't covet him, if I were a girl."

"And such a girl as Nora is," says Lady Saggartmore with a sigh. "How beautiful she looks to-night! I must say that dreadful step-mother seems to be turning out very well. How charming their frocks are!"

"Very smart, indeed!" says Saggartmore, sticking his glass in his eye to look at Nora, who has just entered the

room. "I must say she seems to be bearing up pretty well under Ferris' inconstancy," says he at length.

"She is dancing with St. John Carnegie," says Lady Saggartmore with interest. "Ah! There is a real man. I wish my dear little girl would turn her attentions to him, rather than to that worthless Cyril. I can't tell you how I like that child. She is so gentle, so earnest. Whenever I look at her I think of those lines—what are they?"

" ' Her fair and glorious head.' "

There is much meaning in that little head I believe, and much, *too* much feeling in her heart. I feel towards her sometimes, as though she were my daughter."

"Your sister, my dear! your sister," corrects Saggartmore promptly.

"Oh! George," says she laughing, but very pleased. "Ah! there is Lady Ballybrig! she has come at last!—Constance!" hurrying forwards—"We had quite lost all hope."

"Never lose hope about me!" says Lady Ballybrig gaily. "I'm always sure to turn up. I'm a living illustration of the illegal half-penny. But what is the matter with you and George? As I came in, you were both looking, oh! *so* dull!"

"We were discussing a little friend of ours, who seems in bad case," says Lady Saggartmore hurriedly.

"Dying?" sympathetically.

"Oh! no—not so bad as that, I hope," says she.

* * * * *

Meantime the "little friend" is getting through the hours as best she may. The lovely dance to which she had looked forward to with such high hopes, and such sure belief, seems fated to fall dead as leaves in autumn. He, to whom her heart for ever turns, has held apart from her, never beyond the first simple greeting acknowledging her presence in the room; and without him, what is the night? Where is the splendour in the flowers, the music in the dripping fountains, the quick delight in life that makes the feet move gladly to the sound of the joyous music?

"Without him nought soever is,
Nor was afore, nor e'er shall be,
Nor any other joy than his,
Wish I for mine to comfort me."

When Carnegie had asked her to dance, she had felt a certain sense of anger—he, whom she cannot love, desires to be with her—whilst Ferris, to whom her whole heart is given, holds back from her. The knowledge, too, that some of her friends have believed Ferris to be in love with her, destroys all joy in her, and creates in her a terrible sense of shame. What are they saying now—whispering one to one—are they calling her forsaken—making little jests about her, saying smart things about her? Oh, no—oh, no—she must be growing wicked to accuse her friends of such actions as these.

And yet she feels nervous, as though every one is looking at her, pitying her. She loses herself a little sometimes, and a faint pallor grows upon her cheek, a coldness round her lips, and all the time she has to answer to Carnegie's conversation, and seem as though she is happy! Happy! She could have laughed aloud, had she dared, at the madness of it.

Carnegie, who is very nearly as unhappy as she is, having noticed the sad white look on the beautiful little face so dear to him, is still keeping up the ball of conversation with a determination that ought to win him a cross of some kind. He had arrived rather late; the very fact of his wishing to be here early had seemed to retard all his movements. His one desire had been to see Nora as soon as possible, and everything had combined to delay the fulfilment of that desire.

His very dressing had gone against him. His brush and comb would not obey orders, his studs refused to be found. His collars were nowhere, and his ties had taken French leave. Finally, when he got to the Castle, he found Nora with a card almost full, and a face so sad, through its forced smiles, that all pleasure for him for the night was effectually killed.

That *her* face should be sad! Hers!

"O sweetest face of all the faces
About my way.
A light for night and lonely places
A day in day!"

He *had* gained a dance from her, however, the sixth. It is now at an end, and as he still lingers beside her, loth to depart, Ferris comes up to her, with such a sure air, that Carnegie—believing him to be her partner for the waltz—*just beginning*—bows and withdraws.

"May I have the next?" asks Ferris, in a rather defiant manner. In fault himself, as he knows he is, a very passion of anger against her—of jealousy—because of Carnegie's honest admiration for her, is making his blood hot within his veins.

"The next? I am engaged," says Nora. She speaks quite gently, yet her pulses are throbbing wildly, and a sad, *sad* longing to go away somewhere, and cry her heart out, is troubling her. To cry—on this night! This night to which she had been looking forward for weeks, trusting in her pretty new gown to defy all rivalry! Yet, up to this, she has *been* defied! A sense of passionate resentment upholds her. She even manages so far as to smile at him. She has had to smile a good deal of late! And oh, the awfulness of this perpetual smiling, with a slowly breaking heart.

"Engaged!" He looks at her. "To Carnegie, no doubt."

"No," says she calmly.

"May I see your card?"

"That is so rude," returns she, with a pretty and very successful attempt at gaiety. "But—you may."

"As I thought," says he, after a swift glance at it.

"What? I am certainly not engaged to him for the next."

"If not," gloomily, "for the one after. It is all the same. And as a fact your card seems to have only his name on it."

This is the merest spleen, as, however full her card may be (and it leaves but two blanks), Carnegie's name appears upon it only three times.

"And *your* card?" asks she, still with that pitiful attempt at gaiety. "Whose name is 'only' upon yours?"

"Heaven knows!" returns Ferris adroitly, and with all the air of one indifferent to things of earth. "No one for whom I care a farthing, at any rate."

In spite of herself—against the inward spirit that warns her against him—this sorry reply of his gives balm to her poor hurt soul. "No one for whom I care a farthing," the words are vulgar in themselves, but ordinary, and to her full of hope renewed. It must be remembered, in her *defence*, that she believes in him, honestly, sincerely, and *whilst* sorely puzzled at times, still with a generosity that

belongs to her, flings aside doubts, and tells herself that for this or for that reason he has behaved in such a wise.

"You have only the thirteenth, I see," says he, his eyes wandering over her card.

"A lucky number!" returns she smiling, as he scribbles down his name.

"The sixth from this." Then, in a most uncivil tone: "You will not forget? You will not give it to Carnegie?"

"No." She can hardly get the word out. She feels choked, as though speech is beyond her. Yet she conquers herself.

"Why should I not remember?" asks she. "Why should I not be *glad* to remember?"

Something in her eyes makes the question terrible to him!

CHAPTER XXXII.

"So come in the evening, or come in the morning,
Come when you're called for, or come without warning,
Kisses and welcome you'll find here before you,
And the oftener you're here, the more I'll adore you.
Light is my heart since the day we were plighted,
Red is my cheek that they told me was blighted;
The green of the trees looks far greener than ever,
And the linnets are singing, 'True lovers, don't sever.'"

"WELL! here we are again!" says Mr. Butler, joyfully; "Needless to say" (as a friend of mine would remark) Sophie is his companion. "Here we are again, in public lamplight—*together*—with the eyes of Bally-Saggart, and Sir Fell, upon us, and not one word of reproach."

"Yes! Isn't it lovely?" says Sophie enthusiastically. "I suppose it is the first time for months that we have been *allowed* to be together. But Sir Fell, thank goodness, would be too afraid of Lady Saggartmore to make a row *here*."

"Still—I'm afraid you will have a bad time to-morrow," says her lover regretfully.

"To-morrow is a long way off," says Sophie (though, indeed, "to-morrow" is already with her).

As she speaks, she looks round her on the silent sleeping garden, lit only by the stars in the Heaven above her. She and Denis have wandered out from the dancing-room after their last waltz, to stroll through the cool shrubberies and

enjoy the sweetness of this perfect night. "I wish it were even a longer way off," says she, "'*Now*' is so sweet," with a delightful look at him.

"What a darling you are, Sophie!" says he.

"Not a bit a greater darling than you are," returns she, after which joy reigns for quite a considerable time.

"For all that," says he presently, harking back to his first thought, "I can't bear to think of how disagreeable he may be to you, to-morrow, on account of our dancing so much together to-night. Perhaps. You tell me Miss Baxter—Lady Fell, I mean—is inclined to be friendly towards you; will she help you here, do you think?"

"I'm afraid not; she is so *very* much against Cyril Ferris."

"Oh! *he!* But she can't compare me with Ferris! I don't believe in that fellow somehow. If he *is* in love with Nora, why doesn't he do the correct thing? Why doesn't he ask her to marry him?"

"But he"—eagerly—"Oh, Denis! I *can't* tell you anything; I'm bound in honour to Nolly to say nothing: but as to his proposing to her—well—I—I know something, but it is a dead secret."

"I'll respect it," says Mr. Butler solemnly. "I sha'n't seek to probe it. Far be from me to tear the confidences of one sister out of the heart of another. And so Ferris *did* propose to Nora? Well, I confess I never gave him credit for so much."

"But, Denis, I haven't *said* anything. I haven't *told* you."

"No. No, Sophie. Wild horses, I am quite aware, would not drag a word from you on that subject. But if he *has* asked her to marry him, why is it to be so sacred a secret?"

"I don't know," says Sophie sadly, forgetting all things in her anxiety for her sister. "Because neither of them has any money, I suppose."

"Fiddlesticks!" says Butler brusquely. "There isn't a penny between us either, but I know I'm jolly proud to think that you love me. By-the-way, you know I go up to Dublin next month, and I *think* there is a prospect of my getting a brief or two."

"*No!*" says Sophie, with most unflattering surprise, but *huge* delight.

"Fact! I'll get on—you'll see."

"I *know* you will; and after a while I shall come in for my money, and——"

"Oh! that's a long cry. We sha'n't have to wait till then, I hope," says he.

"No matter how long we wait, we shall always be true to each other," says she, cheerfully. "I wish—I do wish darling Nolly was as happy as I am. But I don't like Cyril. Did you notice how long it was before he asked her to dance?"

"Perhaps he had duty dances to do for Lady Saggartmore."

"Mrs. Vancourt" — scornfully — "would hardly come under the head of a duty dance. She is looking so pretty to-night, and how exquisitely dressed!"

"Is she? I have only time to look at one person's dress, and that is all that it should be. I say, Sophie, I'm getting quite fond of my stepmother-in-law. She seems a real good sort after all."

"She likes Nora better than me," says Sophie thoughtfully. Then, "Yes! she *is* good. I love her!"

"Heavens!" says Butler. "Fancy loving a stepmother; and *only* because she loves somebody better than you! If you go on like this, Sophie, you'll end by being canonized."

"Well, there aren't very many people to love," says Sophie. "I have only you and Nora. Fancy, only two people in all the world! Of course, when I say I love Miranda——"

"Has it come to 'Miranda'?"

"Naturally! She isn't more than forty, after all."

"Young. Quite young," says Butler. "A perfect infant. 'Miranda'—as you say——"

"As I was *going* to say, if I had not been interrupted," says Sophie, severely. "When I said that I loved Miranda, I meant, of course, that I *liked* her. One can't love a person all in a minute."

"Can't one?" asks Mr. Butler, with very distinct emphasis.

"Oh! you know what I mean. One must know and *understand* a person——"

"And a person must know and understand 'one.'"

Unfortunately his tone, which is innocence itself, offends her. Sometimes, as it seems, it is not well "to know and understand a person."

"Of course, you can make game of it all, if you like," says she, ominous lines showing themselves round her pretty soft lips. "But what I mean is, that it takes time to create *real* love in one's heart."

"It didn't take *me* five minutes," says Butler reproachfully.

"I wish you would be serious," says she, bringing her brows to as near an approach at a frown as they are ever likely to know. "The very fitness of things would show you that time is required to mellow one's——"

"There is no fitness in Nature," interrupts he. "Even one's two eyes don't agree, and we all know that one's nose is not to be depended on. It is placed always too much to one side or the other. I don't believe in pure 'fitness.'"

"Perhaps you don't believe in anything," says she.

"I believe in you."

"In me," disdainfully. "You love laughter only in my opinion. You want to make your horrid jokes all day long. Denis!" standing back from him, and addressing him with an air that is almost tragical. "*Do* you love me?"

"Love you!" To her astonishment and indignation—for she is not in the humour for light love-makings of any kind—he catches her in his arms, and gives her what the children call a bear's hug. "Thou of my thou!" says he.

"That will do!" cries she angrily, shaking herself free. "You make a jest of everything. Of even this *sacred* subject." Her tone is very properly aggrieved, and she wards off his further advances with much spirit.

"This is unkind," says he. "What have I said? What have I insinuated? Merely that you are my sole and only love!"

"Well, I'm *not*!" says Sophie, with decision.

"Then name the other," says he, throwing out his hands as if in appeal to the world.

"I know nothing of 'the other.' You are *welcome* to her," says Sophie furiously. "But I am your love no longer."

"My dear girl, it isn't in your power to say that—with any effect, I mean. My love you are, my love you will remain. Nothing can prevent, or destroy, or over-rule that delightful fact. 'My love', you are. That proud distinction belongs to you alone. When we are married, I shall have us introduced into drawing-rooms, not as 'Mr. and Mrs. Butler,' but as 'Denis Butler and his Love!'"

"When we *are* married!" with great scorn.

"Well of course! It couldn't be done *before*! Not at any price. It wouldn't be respectable. My dear child, you should consider! But afterwards I think it will be rather *chic*, eh? Quite a new departure! An innovation! And a compliment to you too, which is everything. Shouldn't wonder if all the society papers took it up and advocated it. Perhaps we ought to take out a patent beforehand. What do you think, eh?"

"I don't think at all," says Sophie sternly. "And if you have quite done talking nonsense, I think I should like to go back to the house and find my next partner."

"You can think about that, anyway," says Butler. "Well—come along, and we'll find that scoundrel, and then I'll have his blood." As he speaks he catches Sophie's hand and tucks it under his arm, and takes a step or two towards the house, that breathe of an impatience to see and deal summarily with his rival.

Sophie, with some show of indignation, attempts to extricate her hand—to no avail.

"Sophia!" says Mr. Butler, imitating Sir Fell to a nicety. "Do you mean to tell me, that your hand is not now in the position where you would have it?"

Sophie makes a last struggle—with her laughter this time—and finally gives way to it.

"Any way, I'm going in," says she, as a last concession to her dignity.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

"But that wave looks dreariest after the storm,
When the wrecks of young hopes its dark bosom deform:
And the heart, like a lone bark, floats mournfully on,
While the comrades it sailed with are shattered and gone."

"It really seems a pity that woman hasn't got some decent friend to put a cloak round her."

Mrs. Brush, with her eye-glass in full use, is staring at Mrs. Vancourt through it, just as Sophie and Denis come to a stand-still near her. Eusebius, who is too lazy to dance much, is also looking on in this quiet recess, just inside the curtains, at the pageant before him. It seems to be a favourite resting place for the dancers, because now pretty Mrs. Moore and her partner, Peter Kinsella, the junior,

come to a stand close to Mrs. Brush, who evinces open annoyance at their proximity, much to pretty Mrs. Moore's delight. She was born in Tipperary—and to be born *there*, means that one is always "spoiling for a fight," as the saying goes in Ireland.

"Oh! no!" cries Mrs. Moore, who is looking both piquante and charming in a dazzling gown of gold and brown, commingled. "*Don't* call for a cloak, Mrs. Brush. It would be sacrilege! As I have told you before, Mrs. Vancourt's gowns are *dreams*—veritable dreams," throwing up her exquisitely gloved hands.

"And as *I* have said before," says Mrs. Brush, grimly, "*you*, of course, will support her."

"To the extent of saying that she has a pretty taste," says Mrs. Moore, smiling. "Not only in her toilettes, but," with a saucy grimace—"in her *lovers*!"

"I suppose you are alluding to Cyril Ferris," says Mrs. Brush. "If you call her regard for that young fool good taste, I don't. However, I don't want to discuss her, and her young men, with anyone. I was alluding to herself alone—and tuckers," severely, and with condemnation—"are cheap."

"Very cheap!" says Mrs. Moore, feelingly. "That's what ails 'em! That's why the best of us won't wear 'em. What's the good of anything that doesn't cost money? Now *I* ordered one—from my woman—but, really, it seems superfluous."

"I quite agree with you," says Mrs. Brush, with a withering glance at her. "Pity, when you *did* order it, you didn't explain that it was meant to be seen!"

"How neat!" says Mrs. Moore, with a return withering glance at her. "Would you like me to put an advertisement in the papers next time? How shall I put it? 'Mrs. Brush and members of the stiff-necked generation, requests that the members of the——'"

"Don't hesitate," says Mrs. Brush. "'Low-necked' generation will describe it perfectly. '*You*—being the president of that precious new society—can show up the whole thing! Explain it all.'"

"Not to you, evidently," says Mrs. Moore. "You seem to know more about it than I do."

"*I* know more about most people than probably *you* imagine," says Mrs. Brush, whose voice is like an east wind.

Her words convey a threatening. Mrs. Moore hearing it, laughs out loud.

"How *funny* you are!" says she. Whereon Mrs. Brush, black with rage, looks over her head and decides upon ignoring her for the rest of the evening. Plainly a dangerous young woman.

"Look at Mrs. Burke!" says Mrs. Moore, presently, pointing to a stout matron dressed in a gown that would have suited a slim maiden of sixteen. "What a guy! She thinks she is still in her 'teens; and yet I remember *hearing* of her through my mother. She must be sixty, if a day."

"Don't be censorious," says Eusebius. "I, like your mother, remember her well in her palmy days, and I can assure you that even now——"

'She'd pass very well for forty-five—
In the dusk, with the light behind her."

"Oh! that's severe, if you like!" says Mrs. Moore.

"If she *does* look old, who is to blame her?" says Mrs. Brush, addressing nobody in particular and taking care to look well over Mrs. Moore's head. "Tom Burke is a disgrace to society! He does nothing but drink brandy, I'm told, from morning till night—and from night till morning."

"What a good thing for her," says Mrs. Moore, frivolously. "He's bound to die soon, isn't he?"

"Why?" asks Eusebius, calmly. "That sort of thing doesn't always come off."

"It's bound to, sooner or later," says Denis; "and Tom Burke would certainly be no loss. Any fellow who drinks as hard as he does, must drop off after a bit."

"Do you think that?" says Eusebius.

"How can you dispute it, Eusebius?" exclaims his mother, indignantly. "Have you a case in point? Can you prove that drink is not destruction?"

"I think so," says Eusebius. "I once knew a person who, for twelve long months, lived on drink alone—never tasted solid food. Not a morsel. What d'ye think of that—eh?"

"Name your subject," says his mother, in a voice of thunder

"*Would not that be betraying confidence?*" demands

Eusebius. He addresses her with quite a timid air. "To give a name to a thing——You all know how one draws back from that ; but if you order me to speak," looking at his mother—"I——*Do* you order me?"

"Certainly I do," sharply.

"Well—it was a Baby!" says Eusebius. "A most depraved baby. I believe, the quantity of milk it drank during those twelve months, was——"

"Eusebius!" says his mother, "be silent! To jest on such subjects is to be immoral yourself."

A silence, fraught with mirth subdued, ensues.

"Good gracious!" says Mrs. Moore presently "How that Mr. Ferris *does* play up to that little heiress woman." She nods her small head towards where Ferris and Mrs. Vancourt are standing, in the interval of the dance, near the opposite wall. "I quite thought he was in love with that pretty Miss Carew."

Sophie, who is standing behind her, out of her view, starts violently.

"He seems to fancy skeletons," says Mrs. Brush, with a sneer; "neither Nora nor that naked little woman over there, have an inch of flesh between them."

"Come away, Sophie," says Butler, suddenly. "Let us finish this dance. Time is flying, and the music is so good."

"No, not yet. Not for a moment," says Sophie breathlessly, whose eyes are fixed on Mrs. Moore, who, to do her justice, would have said nothing had she known she was giving real pain to anyone.

"You was speakin' of Mrs. Vancourt?" says Peter Kinsella. "She's charmin', very charmin', ye know."

"Evidently Mr. Ferris thinks so. He is distinctly *entêté* about her," says Mrs. Moore. "Never takes his eyes off her."

"Yes, as you say, engteetee—engteetee," says Peter, delighted to air his French, which is indeed unique. "Charming language, French, eh? So expressive—full of sweet sayin's, eh?"

"Full!" says Mrs. Moore, laughing. "But I think Mr. Ferris' fancy for your" (saucily) "'charmin'" one lies more in his admiration for the *beaux yeux de sa casette* than for her *beaux yeux au naturel*. Come, there's plenty of your beloved French for you. You can see for yourself how he

looks," intimating Ferris again with a little wave of her fan. "Like a first-class undertaker, eh?"

"Evidently Mrs. Vancourt thinks so too," says Eusebius. "See, she is giving him his *congé*."

"Only because she must," says Mrs. Moore. "She is evidently engaged to the man who has just come up to her. Major Andover, isn't it? I expect he won't have a good time. I can tell you she's nuts on Cyril Ferris, and if he doesn't want to marry her, he'll have times before him."

"Ferris will always want to marry her. She has money," says Eusebius, turning away.

Here somebody, going by, breathes the magic word "Supper," whereupon Mrs. Moore slips her hand through Peter Kinsella's arm again.

"Time for it!" says she. "Good heavens, let us make haste. I'm starving."

"So 'm I," says Peter, with his best air. "Starvin', ye know, perfectly starvin'."

The little *coterie* breaks up, and Sophie turns a very pale face to Denis.

"Is it true—is it all true?" asks she in a dull way.

"Nothing is all true," says he vehemently. "What vile gossips they are. Don't believe them, Sophie don't make yourself miserable. Though——"

He hesitates.

"Go on," says she.

"If all they said *were* true, I think Nora would have a great escape," says he, his eyes on the ground.

"Why don't you take that child in to supper?" says Eusebius, coming up again. He had meant his words to be repeated to Nora, but has been made miserable by Sophie's face. He speaks in a rough, quick way to disguise his feeling. It has occurred to him that a glass of champagne would do her good.

"Yes, come, Sophie," says Denis.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

"Roses for an hour of love,
With the joy and pain thereof,
Stand my lilies white to see,
All for prayer and purity."

INDEED everybody seems to have come in to supper except the very young people—the hopelessly in love, and a few enthusiastic dancers of both sexes. Mrs. Vancourt has been led off to her "chicken and champagne" by a stout old lord, a widower, who has always evinced an interest in her, and whom she once thought might be brought over a captive to her bow and spear. But Lord Brackenmore had held back for so long, had proved so shy, had indeed, in spite of his sixty odd years, coquetted so gaily with his chances with her, that perforce she had given him up as a bad job.

However, to go to supper with a real live lord is always delightful to some people, and Eldon Vancourt, having had very little to do with lords all her lifetime, is one of those people; she sails away on his arm, with her lips arrayed in radiant smiles, and her prettiest words upon them.

It is at this moment—at this moment, when he sees Eldon safely out of sight, that Ferris approaches Nora.

He had been careful about the number of his dance. He had taken care that Nora's card should be pretty well filled before he asked her for a dance. And even if his private arrangements with regard to her had fallen through, he should still have to manage that his first dance with her should be during supper time.

Afterwards! well the Saggartmore party always left early, directly after supper indeed, and then—then he could dance with her whom his soul loveth, so far as that narrow soul *could* love.

"At last!" says he, going up to her. Carnegie has just come up to her too, to beg her to come in to supper with him.

"You *must* be tired," says he. It is no careless remark.

Nora has been in great request all the evening, she could *have had* three partners for every dance; her night has

been a veritable triumph in one way, yet her young heart lies heavy within her.

"If you are too tired," begins Ferris. He cannot take her into the supper-room. To take her in there under the eyes of the jealous, violent Eldon, is to kill all the careful management of the evening. He fixes his eyes on Nora. For well he knows how he can influence her.

"I am not tired," says Nora, smiling at Carnegie. "I should like to dance this waltz, I think, and I have promised it to Mr. Ferris."

"Well then," says Carnegie kindly. "Only don't overdo it. I hope your partner," with a courteous glance at Ferris, "will see that you have something later on."

"I shall take care of her," says Ferris in a tone that is Greek to Carnegie, who suspects nothing, and ambrosia to Nora, who still believes in him. "Come!" He looks at her and she follows him, laying her hand upon his arm, with a soft, slow, gracious backward glance at Carnegie.

"If you are too tired to dance, we can come out into the garden," says Ferris, without looking at his companion.

"Yes, I am tired." Nora's voice corroborates her words.

Taking up a shawl that lies on one of the chairs in the conservatory through which they pass, Ferris would have placed it round the delicate shoulders of his companion, but Nora, in the gentlest way, refuses it. It is a fantastically beautiful little shawl, belonging to Mrs. Vancourt.

"No, no," says Nora smiling. "I want the air; ~~to~~ feel it. I am stifling."

She moves past him, and through the glass doorway into the cool, sweet, dark outside.

It is close on the border that divides day from night, but still night reigns. The sky,

"Thick strewn with silver stars,"

is gleaming, its crescent moon strewing the earth with gleams. All round them, as they go down the pathways towards the garden, the perfume of flowers goes with them, the whole lovely world around them, indeed, seems "on fire with roses." Far away one can hear the sound of the rushing river, hurrying, hurrying always to the sea.

There is *such* a silence! It seems to beat upon one's heart. It beats upon Nora's, as though it means to kill her. Will he *never* speak? Never! Never! The sound

of her own light footsteps seems so loud in this strange calm of night, that it terrifies her. How *still* the darkness is! Oh! he must speak soon. He will explain, take away all her doubts, her misery.

She is right, he speaks almost at once.

"Well, I suppose you are going to marry him?"

"Marry——!" she stops dead short upon the gravelled walk, and stares at him through the silvery light. Her heart has almost ceased to beat, involuntarily she lays one hand upon her breast. "Marry?" she says again faintly.

"Yes. You know who I mean. Carnegie." A sense of shame touches him, as he sees her gazing at him with something that is almost terror in her beautiful eyes. The meanness that has led him to get out of his own falseness, by throwing an imputation of falseness upon her, grows suddenly clear to him. Surely the light from those pure, honest eyes have shed that light that shows him how he stands; gradually—*very* gradually—her expression changes, a touch of disdain betrays itself. Ferris seeing it, and seeing himself *in* it condemned, grows angry.

"You cannot deny, at all events, that he is in love with you."

"I am not here to deny anything," says she in a low tone.

"What do you mean by that?"

"What I have said, Cyril, no more."

"You acknowledge he is in love with you then. He has probably told you so. And you have listened——" He pauses as if for a reply, but none comes. She is still looking at him as if wondering, but he reads her expression wrongly. A sudden fear seizes upon him.

Of late he has told himself that his secret engagement with Nora must have an early end. It had seemed a simple thing to him to break with her, to part from her, to walk in *this* path whilst she walked in *that*. But now, now—when it seems to him possible that she herself has so arranged it, a very rage of desire for her possesses him. To let her go to another! And that she should be *wishing* to go! That is where the sting is keenest!

"You have said 'yes' to him?" says he fiercely.

"'Yes,' to him! *You* ask me that?"

"Don't prevaricate!" says he furiously. "You *have* said 'yes'?"

"Certainly not!" with a frown.

"Yet you have danced half the night with him."

"Probably for that very reason," bitterly.

"Because——?"

"I have *not* said 'yes' to him."

The reproach is to the point. She has said "yes" to the man before her, and yet, this is her first dance with him. Ferris' colour changes. He looks away from her, yet to look away is not to lose sight of her beauty—never so beautiful as now, when the charming frock, given to her by her step-mother, permits her to look as lovely as she really is. Memory is sight, and though he is gazing idly into a rose bush close at hand, he sees nothing but Nora—her reproachful eyes, her sad little mouth, the exquisite lines of her childish figure.

He turns suddenly to her.

"You are teaching yourself to hate me," says he, with a burst of passion. "Soon you will succeed. And, perhaps, it will be better so. But, to-night, Nora—you wrong me to-night! You think I did not care to dance with you. You *do* think that, though you must be mad to think it. I tell you, my every thought was yours all this accursed evening, and that every time you danced with Carnegie it was as though you had struck me."

As is usual with him, *for the moment*, he is in earnest, and his earnestness goes to her heart—a heart only too ready to receive, to accept his excuses, to believe in him, to worship him again; yet pride holds her back from a swift surrender.

"If that is so," says she coldly, though her voice is trembling, and she is now afraid to let her eyes meet his, "why did you not claim some of Mr. Carnegie's dances?"

"You ask me that, with Sir Fell in the room!"

It is a vile way of exonerating himself, and he knows it, but now there is only one goal before him, to retrieve his position with her, to be loved again, as she *has* loved him. The sweetness, the perfectness of her, has brought to life once more the old charm she had for him. Never, perhaps, has he loved her as keenly as in this hour, when for the first time it has occurred to him that he shall, after all, lose her.

"Sir Fell was in the room with Sophie and Denis Butler—yet Denis——"

"Oh! I know—I know," interrupts he impatiently. "Butler—how does he seem to you? Selfish? Surely he is selfish. To expose the girl he loves to Sir Fell's anger to-morrow, for the sake of enjoying himself to-night, what is that but selfishness of the keenest sort? Surely you must see it in that light. You must see that Butler has behaved abominably. That he has placed Sophie in a position that is positively cruel."

He pauses—waiting, longing for her reply.

"Denis is not selfish!" says she at last in a low tone.

"Of course you defend him. You would defend anyone but me. To me alone you refuse a generous word!"

"Is that fair?" says she. It is all she *can* say. Another word, and she knows that her bursting heart will give way, and tears disgraceful pour down her pale, thin little cheeks. Oh! that it should come to this! How *little* a time ago it seems since she had first seen him, liked him, *loved* him, with an absorbing love that now spells nothing but ruin to her heart's content.

"Love on my heart from heaven fell,
Soft as the dew on the flowers of spring,
Sweet as the hidden drops that swell
Their honey-throated chalice."

But now, now, *now*, where is *his* love? Oh! how many miles—how many long years behind her!

"Are you fair to *me*?" says he. Then all at once the catch in his words takes him: "Oh, *too* fair," cries he. "Too fair; you are the very life of me. Whatever comes, Nora, whatever in all our two lives happens either to separate or force us together, remember always that you are the one thing I have ever loved!"

Nora covers her eyes with her hands as though to shut him out. She had told herself an hour ago that she would submit no longer to his half attentions. She would divide his love with no one. Yet now, the old fascination is strong upon her, and once again the well of bubbling joy and delight, and happiness stirs her breast! The "life-reviving fountains of Jouvence" are springing upwards in her bosom.

He makes a movement as if to take her hands in his, but still she holds back.

"If you could not dance with me," says she, "still, you *need not* have danced so much with Mrs. Vancourt!"

"Mrs. Vancourt!" returns he with a wonderful attempt at derision, but with so sickly a smile, that he is thankful the moon is, after all, but a poor sort of light beside an ordinary decent lamp. "What has she got to do with you and me?"

"Sometimes I have thought," says Nora, crushing a rose beneath her nervous fingers—"sometimes I have fancied—that she *hates* me. I cannot bear the expression in her eyes when she looks at me. I," pausing as though it is impossible to her to go on—"I——"

She stops again as though she cannot bring herself to say the words that are upon her lips.

"What have you fancied?" demands Ferris—with all the courage of one who would know and deal with the worst.

"That *she* loves you—too!"

The "too," is pathetic. Ferris bursts out laughing. It is a strange laughter, wild, without mirth.

"You laugh!" says she.

"At *you*! But! What a fancy!" He smiles at her, though his soul is writhing within him. "Could she love anyone, but herself?"

"Is that true?" says Nora quickly. "Is that the way in which you think of her? Cyril!" she leans towards him, and lays both her little, pretty hands upon his arms. Her gloves are long, but just above them the sweet soft flesh of her arms shines. "Cyril—tell me this— You—you don't care for her in any way, do you?"

"What a question!" says he, almost violently.

"Yet answer it. You—you *dislike* her more than otherwise?"

"I dislike her."

"Ah!" A little low laugh breaks from her. A laugh that would make one cry—so full it is of late miseries and despairs, that must have crushed her heart to death. She holds out her arms to him. "Ah! say it *again*!" cries she. "It is true—it is true then. They are all wrong. You"—holding back her head to look at him, even whilst his arms are round her—"you *don't* want to marry her, do you?"

"No!" says he. He strains her to him, even though a last sense of dishonour stirs his soul.

It is *lie upon lie*, and he knows it. His heart sickens

within him. At this moment, holding her as he does to his breast, he almost resolves to throw up all his ambitions, to cast away from him the longings for the flesh-pots of Egypt that have all his life possessed him, and give himself over to the love that might in time purify him.

Almost! Even as he holds her, even as her tender arms lie round his neck and her soft cheek is pressed against his own reason, as he calls it, returns to him.

He puts her a little from him, and whilst still with his hands clasping her, and her lovely eyes smiling into his, he recovers himself.

"We must think, however," says he. "We must consider."

He laughs—shaking her softly and making a little mirth out of it all. "Two such paupers *should* be gay," says he. "It is all that is left them."

"Oh! no, there is love!" says Nora. "I love you, and you love me! That is everything! There is nothing left to desire!"

Her tone rings so clear, so true—above all so trusting that it strikes like a dagger to his heart. He resents the sudden pain—the sharp knowledge that if his soul were laid bare to her this second she would write him down a scoundrel. Ferris is so constituted that to think himself despised by anyone is to be conscious of extreme discomfort, of anguish almost, for the time being. His feelings are transitory. But for the time they agonize him. So keen they are now as she exposes him to himself as a mere falsehood, that he all but *hates* her for the sense of self-contempt she has so unknowingly driven into his breast.

Like all his emotions, however, this too is short. His self contempt dies away, and with it his anger towards her. She is too beautiful for anger to touch her closely. All hearts are open to beauty, except indeed, as in Nora's case, the heart of a step-father.

The sound of an approaching foot upon the gravel rouses them both. He releases her partly; letting her stand a little from him, yet still holding one of her hands.

"We cannot speak now—not now," whispers he hurriedly. "But to-morrow, in the evening, you will meet me at the old place down by the bridge. Promise me, Nora."

"Yes. Yes. To-morrow. Who was that? Who went by?"

"It is so hard to see. Carnegie, I think."

"He did not see us?"

"No. Are you"—suspiciously—"afraid he *should*?"

"Cyril!" says she, stopping short again. They are now on their way back to the house, and a standing bush of old-fashioned roses hides them from the common path. "*Don't* distrust me. It hurts me, that you should. I don't distrust you! I don't indeed. I love you, that is all."

That a soul so steeped in worldliness, *could* seem fresh and true to anyone, seems half impossible, yet to Nora—to this fresh young soul, void of duplicity and falsity of any kind—all things are possible. Cyril has told her he does *not* love Mrs. Vancourt—that he *does* love her. She desires no more, she is thoroughly content.

"Not *all*," says he passionately. "My love for you, that counts for something surely!"

He throws his arms round her and kisses her. She returns his embrace tenderly. Are they not engaged? Is she not all to him, and he to her? Oh! how she loves him!

"Without him nought soever is,
Nor was before, nor e'er shall be,
Nor any other joy than his
Wish I for mine to comfort me."

Not only loves—but oh! how she believes in him!

"Come—come, we must go in," says she.

CHAPTER XXXV.

"Still was it thine to cope,
Eire a ruin,
Still against hope to hope,
Eire a ruin,
Even through blackest woe,
Fronting that tyrant foe,
Whom thou shalt yet lay low,
Eire a ruin."

WITH a light and buoyant step, she runs up the stone stairs leading to the balcony, from which the ball-room may be gained more easily than if one were to approach it from the conservatory side. At the far end of the balcony she can see Mrs. Vancourt sitting, with Eusebius Brush beside her. Mrs. Vancourt sees her too, and rises slowly, grace-

fully. She says a few words to Eusebius, laughing as she says them. Nora can hear that gay, clear, metallic little laugh—whereupon Eusebius, though with apparently a bad grace, disappears through the window into the dancing-room beyond.

Mrs. Vancourt, after a swift glance in his direction, to see that he is safely off the premises, turns to Nora, and rustles towards her and Ferris—a most gracious little figure, in her exquisite gown of palest blue and gold.

"You—dear Miss Carew!" cries she, in her soft treble, and with the most artless amazement. "And you too, Cyril! I *fancied* I knew you, as you came up the steps. Oh, Cyril!" with a light little confidential laugh, and laying her hand on his arm with a most proprietary air, "do you remember what we were saying about the Moores? Well, it's all *true*. I'll tell you," in a half whisper, and lifting her face very close to his ear, "about it later on." Her sharp, decisive, little manner, her little smirk—the half-whisper, all prove her so terribly half-bred, that Nora stares at her. Stares at her with a sinking heart, however. By what right does she lay her hand upon his arm—whisper to him—make little confidences? Nora's face grows very pale, the light dies out of her eyes, all the glad joyousness that had clothed her as with a garment, as she ran up the steps just now, falls away from her, yet she holds her young head high, and looks at her rival with a glance that has nothing in it of hatred or doubt or suspicion. It is a very proud glance.

"What a delightful evening," says Mrs. Vancourt turning to her. Ferris has been a little irresponsible over the confidences, and now the thing that Mrs. Vancourt calls her heart is full of rage towards the calm girl who is looking back at her, with no rage at all in her heart, but only a growing despair. "But warm, so warm! No wonder you went into the garden."

"It was warm, even there," says Nora, quietly, coldly.

"No doubt," with a quick glance at Ferris, that he catches, but that goes by Nora without understanding; "you *do* look warm."

"Do I?" says Nora, putting up her pretty hands to her cheeks (which, indeed, are as white as snow now, though *when she ran up those steps they were glowing with love and life*), "oh, I am sorry!"

"Yes, to be flushed is to be untidy," says Mrs. Vancourt friendly. "And your hair. *May* I put up your hair? It is a little—just a little rough. They will say," lightly, "that you and Cyril have been running a race."

"Well, we haven't," says Nora, something in the other's tone offending her. "No, don't touch my hair, please. I," running her own fingers quickly over it, "think it is all right. Is it all right?" turning suddenly to Ferris. "*Is* it rough?"

She appeals to him. Her whole life seems to depend upon his answer. Upon the answer to this most trivial question. And in truth it *does* so hang. She is trembling, poor child, and all the light of her love for him, her belief in him, her dependence upon him, is shining through her uplifted eyes. Oh, if *only* he would uphold her judgment, and so fling Mrs. Vancourt from the pedestal on which she has placed herself! Even now she will not acknowledge that Ferris might have placed her there! This woman—who she instinctively feels hates her—who is bent on doing her as bad a turn as she can.

She is looking at Ferris, what will he say?

"Well," says he, at last, smiling with a terrible determination, but smiling successfully for all that, "you must forgive me, Miss Carew, but perhaps it *is* a little rough——" He pauses! To his dying day he never forgets the look in the poor child's eyes as he thus denies her. "Rough—but charming," says he.

"Oh, yes, so charming," says Mrs. Vancourt, jubilantly. "The most beautiful hair in the world. I have always said that. But have you been dancing much? I think so. I saw you!" with pretty meaning, "Dancing a good deal with *somebody*! Somebody whose name begins with C."

Nora makes a faint gesture. She feels stunned—half dead—yet through all the numbness that is killing her young heart, a sort of horror of the pretty little creature before her—of her vulgarity—her cruelty—rises and oppresses her.

"Yes. It has been a delightful night," goes on Mrs. Vancourt gaily. "I can't think *where* Lady Saggartmore got all the men. So difficult in country places to get a man at all!"

"There are several regiments stationed in Cork now," says Nora, quietly, though when she speaks her voice

sounds so far away, so strange, that involuntarily she glances at Ferris to know if he has noticed the terrible change in it. He is looking away from her, however.

"Ah! true. But yet it is not always easy to persuade them to come down—to a dance, I mean. Now, if it were to kill a few partridges, they'd come at once. Men are cruel—don't you think so, Miss Carew?"

"I have always found them kind," says Nora smiling, whose hands are clasped so closely together, through anguish of spirit, that the nails in them are making marks in the pretty flesh beneath them.

"Ah, you would—of course!" says Mrs. Vancourt—her smile now is a little vicious, the girl's answer has enraged her. Does the little silly fool think that she—*she* has not found men kind also? "You—may I whisper it to you?—you are so lovely that *all* men must be at your feet. You can marry where you please. The man of your choice is for you alone. I do envy girls like you—but, of course, poor old married people like me cannot hope to cope with girls. However, we were talking of cruelty, were we not? Men, Miss Carew!" with a swift, sweet glance at Ferris, that betrays a great many things, but above all other things a thorough understanding with him, "are impossible creatures. One may think one knows them, and all at once—pouf," with an airy wave of her fan, "one finds they are out of one's mental reach altogether." She looks at Ferris, and shakes a fan at him. "Come now, Cyril, deny all that if you can."

There is an unmistakable air about her of being on excellent terms with him. She has challenged Ferris directly this time, and he gives her back an answer of some sort.

"Yes. We are all devils," says he, smiling. It is a very sickly smile.

"Oh, no, you must not use 'cuss words,'" says little Mrs. Vancourt, laughing. "And even if you *do* slaughter little birds, still, I suppose there will be always someone to condone your offence. I, for one. Will you believe it, Miss Carew? I have actually preserves on my own grounds, where wicked keepers look after the poor partridges and grouse and pheasants, and make them fat for the guns of their enemies. I have often protested against it, but Parkins, my head-keeper, says it must be done. He

gives me to understand that if gentlemen can't be amused they will go to the bad, and——"

She stops and laughs, and looks at Ferris. His determined silence is maddening her. He sees this and forces himself to say something.

"That is not fair," says he, making his dull remark with as bright an air as he can.

"Fair! There is nothing fair in the whole wide world," says she—as gaily as possible. "And you will be unfair to the partridges next month! Do you know, Miss Carew, Mr. Ferris has promised to come to me—to my place in Shropshire—next month—to help me to entertain my guests, and to kill my birds—*poor* birds!—I detest cruelty of any sort—don't you?"

"Oh! I don't think you do," says Nora, shaking her head and speaking quite as one would who had no *arrière pensée* of any sort. "You see you *will* let your birds be killed; you——" She breaks off—a terrible choking in her throat strangles her next words; she gazes a little wildly round her, but Ferris is looking away—over the balcony down into the sleeping garden, and plainly, thank Heaven! Mrs. Vancourt has felt no special meaning in that sudden break.

"Oh! yes—I seem unkind—but we English people take our birds so lightly. And men must shoot something. Cyril is coming to shoot my place—aren't you, Cyril?"

"Thanks," says Cyril; his tone is not suffused with joy.

"So *good* of him to come," says Mrs. Vancourt, addressing Nora, and looking at her indeed, through the dull, uncertain light, with a fixed and malignant scrutiny—"when he has so many engagements. But he has cancelled them all for *me*. Don't you think it sweet of him? *I* do."

"Oh, no!" says Nora calmly, distinctly, yet with a terrible effort—for her heart is beating almost to suffocation. She is remembering all he had said to her just now in the dewy garden. How he had derided her idea that he cared for Mrs. Vancourt—for any one in all the sweet, wide, happy world but her. Is there no truth anywhere—is *all* a lie? "All men like shooting——"

She looks desperately round her. The desire to get away—from him, from her—is becoming a passion. She looks through the open windows of the ball-room, and sees Carnegie. Ah! *he* will help her.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

"O, thou blooming, milk-white dove,
 To whom I've given true love,
 Do not, ever thus reprove—My constancy."

* * * * *

"O! my Nora Creina, dear!
 My own, my artless, Nora Creina."

HE is not dancing. There is an expression on his face that gives her the idea that he is looking, watching, for somebody. He is supposed to be talking to Lady Ballybrig—but as she usually does all that sort of thing, his attempt at it comes to little. It seems to Nora that he is indeed hardly attending to her, though she is evidently very much amused herself at the story she is telling him, *so* amused, indeed, that she fails to notice his inattention. Who is he looking for? Oh! whoever it may be, he must—he *must* come and help her now!

Her eyes are fastened on him, with so eager, so earnest a gaze—a gaze so compelling, that it actually demands a return. As though he felt it—Carnegie turns slowly in her direction—like most people, he grows restive beneath the continued observance of any one—and presently sees her.

She is standing just outside the open window—framed in by it—a perfect picture, in her white, beautiful gown, and that touch of despair—that passionate appeal in her eyes. A picture of despair, however!

Carnegie gives way to a little impulsive gesture. *Is it* Nora? or is it her wraith? Lady Ballybrig is still rattling off her wonderful little bit of gossip, and takes no notice of him. But Carnegie hears nothing—he sees only Nora. The appeal in her eyes draws him to her. He murmurs some apologetic words, and Saggartmore, coming up to them providentially at this moment, he invents an excuse of some sort, and goes straight to the window opposite.

"You want——" he is beginning, so far carried away by the fear that has been consuming him ever since those sad, sweet eyes have met his, that he has forgotten all things—conventionality, everything; and besides he had believed *her alone*, out there in the dark. It is almost a shock to

him to see Ferris and Mrs. Vancourt behind her! The light had not fallen upon them.

He stops short, but Nora supplies the pause.

"Our dance, I think," says she.

It is not; but Carnegie, answering the imploring look in her eyes, says instantly:

"Ours indeed!" He draws her hand through his arm, and leads her into the ball-room. He can see that she gives no backward glance to either Ferris or Mrs. Vancourt. Did she feel herself *de trop*? He had heard that Ferris was going to marry Mrs. Vancourt. But that could hardly have given cause for that sad, anguished look in her sweet eyes.

Whatever the mystery may be, however—he is the gainer by it. She has called to him—to *him*—to help her. Carnegie's heart glows within him.

Everyone is dancing. An exquisite waltz is ringing through the room.

"Just to the door," he says, passing his arm round her waist. She gives herself to him for the moment, but unwillingly, as he feels, and as they reach the door that leads to the halls outside, he stops suddenly, still supporting her.

"Come and sit down somewhere," says he.

"Yes, I should like to sit down," says she; she is looking at him, and suddenly her eyes grow brighter. "How *good* you are to me," says she.

"Oh! good!" says he, with a careful laugh—though in truth his heart is heavy, yet without knowledge. He leads her to the library. It is empty, save for a very young couple, who rise tumultuously, and fly away before they have time to take their seats.

"Was that a lie?" says Nora, with an attempt at light-heartedness, as she sinks upon a lounge, and thanks Heaven that the lamps are very low. They are so low, indeed, that she regains a little of the courage that Nature has given her, and, leaning back against the amber satin of the curtains behind her, that contrast so charmingly with her nut-brown hair—she lets a soft smile widen her lips.

She looks so small, so sweet, and so desirable in every way, that Carnegie, gazing at her, forgets to answer.

"A lie, I am afraid," continues she, smiling still. "But you will *forgive* it. I—I wanted to get away. But now

that I am away, do not waste your time with me, Mr. Carnegie, go and find your real partner. I shall be quite happy here."

"Without me?" says Carnegie.

His tone is a question, and, considering how he has helped her to her present emancipation, she feels that she owes him something. Yet, to be alone, to be able to run through the last hateful scene—to analyze it—to *think*.

. . . What a *bore* this man is!

Yet courtesy and justice meeting in her breast compel the smile with which she answers him.

"Oh no. If you wish to stay—if you have no partner——"

"I have no partner, and I wish to stay," says he. "If I may!"

"Certainly you may." She smiles at him very kindly, though her whole soul is sick with a fierce longing to be alone. Perhaps the strain she lays upon herself makes the smile *too* kind. It is so hard to regulate one's feelings to the very exact inch.

"Thank you," says Carnegie gently. He is leaning forward, looking at her. He had always thought her the prettiest creature he had ever seen, but now, in her *lovely* gown so creamy-white, so soft, so rich, and with her folded hands lying in her lap, she seems to him a very dream of beauty. Her bright hair is piled up on her small head. Her eyes are downcast, the sad bistre shades lying under those sweet eyes, tell their own tale, but one he cannot read. No key is given him. She is always a little pensive—and those mournful shades only give her now an additional charm. Her little slight figure, child-like in its outlines, seems to him the dearest thing he has ever seen——

Suddenly a mad, wild longing to tell her what is in his heart!—to tell her that he loves her—fills him. It is a madness he knows—she has never shown even a desire to meet him, to talk with him, to be friends with him, as the children say. She has held herself indeed a little aloof. It had been an experience with Carnegie, who has been all his life sought after, and flattered in many ways. Perhaps this very indifference on her part had enhanced her value *in his eyes*. Whatever the value he sets upon her however—it is undoubtedly a priceless one. To him, she is the

one woman in the world, and yet he, who has had the world at his feet so far, despairs when he thinks of her.

"Thou didst delight my eyes :
Yet who am I? Nor first,
Nor last, nor best, that durst
Once dream of thee for prize ;
Nor this the only time
Thou shalt set love to rhyme."

Now, as he moves, and leans still a little nearer to her, his desire comes to a growth. He tells himself that nothing will come of his declaration, that his love will be as nothing in her eyes. Still to *tell* her.

"Nora!" His voice has sunk to a mere whisper, but a penetrating one. "Has it ever occurred to you that I—love you?"

Nora's eyes are uplifted now—she stares at him blankly for a moment.

"No! no!" cries she hurriedly. She puts out her hands. "No, not another word. "Not"—wildly—"one. Oh! *Don't* go on!"

There is a mixture of despair, and horror, and hatred in the expression that crosses her beautiful little face. A hatred of love it is! Of love only—not of Carnegie, but only of the pretty winged demon who has killed her young life—she so young, so sweet, to whom love should be as a lantern guiding her on her way, has found love dark as night.

"I shall not say another word," says Carnegie earnestly, "if you so wish it!" Her manner has checked him—shocked him. "At least not now. But, I shall ask you, Nora, to remember what I have said. To remember that I love you. And if, as I hope you are—heart-whole, I——"

She puts up her hand suddenly, just as if to check him, and then to her throat as if to stop the little sharp cry to which she is longing to give birth.

Her tender conscience is at work. She has known for a long time that Carnegie loves her, and to let him now declare himself is terrible to her. To her, whose thoughts are all filled with the image of another—another—who—who has *no* thought for her.

She lowers her hand and clenches it. A very rage of misery darkens her poor eyes. Oh! what has she done to *Heaven* that it should now prove so unkind!

But she ought to tell Mr. Carnegie. She ought indeed. He has told her that he believes her heart-whole, and—— But to confess to him—to confess what? Her love for a man who——

The hands clench each other even more sharply—the stab as of a sharp knife runs through her heart. To love, where one is not loved! Oh! no—it is impossible. And besides—she is not sure—Cyril—*may* love her in spite of all. To-morrow evening he will tell her. Oh!—yes he will tell her that all this vague horrible doubting was a huge, a sad mistake, and that he does love her, even as she loves him:

Her thoughts have run like lightning. Carnegie is conscious of only a slight hesitation when she says to him:

“It has nothing to do with it,” she says distinctly. Her voice frightens her—it sounds hoarse to herself, and all the lights seem blurred, but gazing at Carnegie through this imaginary gloom it seems to her that he sees nothing. This gives her courage. In truth Carnegie does see nothing but a beautiful child—sad, anxious—uncertain.

“*What* has nothing to do with it,” says he. “It has everything to do with it. If you love no one else—why, there is still a chance for me. Nora—my Nora Creina! give me one word of hope!”

“Oh! not one—not one!” says she rising. She feels as though she were gasping for air. It is all so cruel! The man she loves—does not—or—*does* he love her? And this man, whom she cannot love, is telling her that she is all the world to him. Where is justice? Where is peace to be found?

“Not *one*!” says he. “Nora! think.”

“If I thought for ever,” says she, a little wildly, “it would be all just the same.”

“But why? Am I so repulsive to you?”

There is such sorrow in his tone that it brings her back to her true self.

“Mr. Carnegie, don’t think that,” says she vehemently. “Repulsive—No. I like you.”

“If so,” says he—he too is standing now, and as he speaks he takes her hands and presses them. “If so, all may yet be well between us. Your stepfather seems to *think*——”

“*Sir Fell!*” She drags her hands out of his, and moves

away from him, looking at him with blanched cheeks and parted lips. "You have not told *him*!"

Carnegie pauses and grows pale. It is only an hour ago since he spoke to Sir Fell. It had seemed to him the direct, the honourable course to pursue.

"I—" he begins; and then, seeing those two large frightened eyes staring into his, and that little child-like attitude, with the hands now pressed against the breast, his courage fails him. "How shall I tell you?" says he. "And yet I must tell you. I—I *have* spoken to him."

"You—" she stops short as if it is impossible to her to go on. Her hands are still pressed against her bosom.

"Yes. I spoke to him. I did not know you would resent it. I——Nora! Do not look at me like that. Do you think I would wilfully hurt you in any way? Do you think I would not *die* to save you one pang?"

"You spoke to him——?"

"Yes, yes. But what does it come to after all? You can refuse me! As a fact you *have* refused me. You can explain it to him. He will understand."

"You don't know Sir Fell."

"I don't think you need be troubled in any way about it," says he. "If you do not care to explain it, *I* can. I"—slowly and with a sharp touch of pain in the eyes he has fastened on her—"I can withdraw my proposal."

"I *said* you did not know him," interrupts she, with a quick, a most miserable little laugh. "He will hold you to your proposal. He will compel me to accept it."

"He cannot hold me to anything," says Carnegie, haughtily.

"No? Then he will represent you to the county as a man devoid of honour—he——"

"It would be for you!" says Carnegie, calmly. "And *you* would know how it was. There is no one else now that matters at all."

"But I—I too can feel," she says, growing deadly pale. "I—rather than that you should so suffer on my account—I——"

"Pshaw!" says he, rather rudely. "Do you think I should accept such a sacrifice from you?"

"No. I suppose not." She sighs. "Well, do *this* then," says she. "Let things remain as they are for

awhile. Perhaps—I shall be able to find my way out of it.”

“As you will.” His tone is very cold. “But why annoy yourself about it? You can tell Sir Fell to-morrow morning that you have refused me—or—I can tell him.”

“Oh, no. Oh, *don't!*” says she. She is trembling now. “Mr. Carnegie, I have been rude to you perhaps—I have not said the things that people *ought* to say when—when people ask them to marry them. But—forgive me that—and don't, *don't* tell Sir Fell I have refused you. He will be so angry—he——” She breaks down, struggles with herself for a moment, and then bursts into tears.

“Nora. Nora, darling! Good Heavens, Nora! Don't cry like that. What have I said? There is somebody coming. Here, come here behind the curtain, and out to the balcony. There now! Nora! look at me—and forgive me.”

“There is nothing to forgive,” says she. She is drying her eyes with her handkerchief, and now looks up at him with forlorn but lovely eyes. “You have been only *too* good to me. It is only that I am tired, nervous. I should like to go home, I think. Will you take me to Lady Anketell?”

“Certainly,” but as she takes a step towards the window, he suddenly follows her and lays a detaining hand upon her arm. “Will you answer me one thing?” says he with agitation, an agitation so great that he finds it impossible to repress it. It is at this moment, indeed, that a strange doubt has for the first time arisen in his mind. *How* it has come (or why) *now*—or why not sooner, is one of those riddles that never can be answered. “I remember now,” says he, “that you were with Ferris in the garden awhile since. I passed you. I saw you. You—he—he is not in love with you, is he?”

“Oh! no—no—no!” cries she. Something like Death catches at her heart. (Does he love her?) Suddenly she bursts out laughing.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

"Aye ! bitter hate, or cold neglect,
Or lukewarm love, at best,
Is all we've found, or can expect."

MRS. VANCOURT, left alone with Cyril, had turned to him. Her eyes are full of light, and something else too ! Ferris, seeing that "something else," feels his colour grow a trifle paler. Has the whole thing come to an end ?

His soul dies within him at the very thought. There had been moments when he had told himself he would feel *thankful* if an occasion should arise in which she would cast him from her, yet now, when this occasion seems imminent, he recoils from it. It would mean so many things, the disappearance of the flesh-pots of Egypt for ever for *one* thing, and *that*—after all—the principal thing. Sometimes, when with Nora, looking at her, adjudging her sweetness—her truth—her honour, at its proper worth, he *had* felt that love gained, though the world were lost, would be well. But come to the point, and Nora out of sight, he thinks otherwise. The young man's soul does not rise to great heights, and at present it stands at a very low level.

Mrs. Vancourt is still looking at him. There is something about her protracted silence that suggests the idea that she has so much to say that she hardly knows where to begin. This delay, so far as she is concerned, is fatal—perhaps it saves Ferris. As she stands with her little slim body poised as it were for a spring, and her eyes darting poison, Eusebius Brush once again appears upon the scene.

He stands just inside the half-opened window, leaning his arms on each lintel, and smiles blandly at Mrs. Vancourt.

"You told me to go," says he. And I think you meant me to stay away—*for ever*. But blame your own fascinations in that I have returned again. Come in and have some supper—your first attempt at it, I noticed—(you see how my thoughts have always flown to you)—was vague indeed. There are some new things now on the table, that may tempt you. Come."

"I—" says Mrs. Vancourt. She had been evidently

prepared to say a good deal—her eyes, except for a swift moment, had never left Ferris. “I——”

“Ferris, Lady Saggartmore wants you,” says Eusebius, in his soft, heavy way. “There is some trouble about the lamps in the morning-room. She said you could settle them.”

“I know. It is that tall bronze affair. It never really gives *any* light,” says Ferris. He passes Eusebius quickly, and as he does so, lets a swift glance fall upon him, and there’s gratitude in it.

“Come in and eat something,” says Eusebius, cheerfully, giving Mrs. Vancourt his arm. “Even the most ethereal of creatures cannot live on nothing.”

“I am not the most ethereal of creatures,” says she sullenly. She accepts his arm, however, though with a distinctly bad grace, and goes with him towards the supper room.

“Well, perhaps not the *only* ethereal one,” says Eusebius. “I must confess that you have a rival in that line.”

“A rival?”

The words strike unpleasantly on her ear. She has not time to follow up this subject just now, however, as they have reached the supper room, entered it, and the salutations to the people they know as they pass them by, the little, pretty, unmeant things that are bound to pass from lip to lip, takes them all their time.

Presently, however, having piloted her to the top of the table, where, as is usual, the crush is less, he asks her what she would like.

“What a question,” says she. “Is there *ever* a choice?”

It is plain to Eusebius that she is in a bad temper, and the cause of it is not far to seek. She had been taken away from Ferris just as she was about to reduce him to dust—and his allegiance to her. Eusebius feels that *he* is the “cause,” and rather rejoices in the knowledge than otherwise. It may spare Nora in some vague way. Ferris, so far as he is concerned, might be reduced to dust at any moment—the sooner the better, in fact—but Nora!

Nora likes him! The more fool Nora! But that Nora does like Ferris has been an open secret to Eusebius for a long time. And yet—so strange are these queer human hearts of ours—Eusebius dislikes even beyond Ferris the woman who would be instrumental in bringing destruction

upon Nora's love dream. Without hope of ever winning Nora himself, Eusebius still declares himself on her side, and without clear knowledge of it, is an untiring enemy towards those who would make wreck of her young life.

"There are several, I *think*," says Eusebius, looking round.

"Not one!" says she insolently. "Chicken and ham. Ham and chicken! It is always the same. I expect," with a contemptuous curve of her chin and a very vulgar little laugh, "I've had about enough chicken and ham to last me *this* side Jordan!"

"I hope you will get something better on the other side," says Eusebius tenderly. "But you ought to give directions beforehand."

"I daresay," says she frowning.

That she detests Eusebius has been open to him for a long time, but it is never so clear to him as when at this instant she calls to Peter Kinsella, who is just passing by with a plate.

"Dear Mr. Kinsella, is that you?" says Mrs. Vancourt, smiling her loveliest smile at Peter. "What have you got there? Something fit to eat? Give it to me."

"I was just goin' to serve a goddess!" says Peter, in his last-century tone. "I had believed one goddess sufficient in our degenerate age, but now here's another. Mrs. Vancourt, if I may lay this on your shrine," depositing the plate he is carrying before her, "I shall indeed be the envied of those who rest in Olympus!"

"Olympus?" says Mrs. Vancourt, whose education, it must be confessed, was in her youth limited.

"Yes—yes. Heathen gods!" says Peter. "An' I must apologize for mentionin' them before you at all, Mrs. Vancourt, for their conduct was at times—well—lively ye know—lively!"

"*Quite* so!" says Eusebius with a face as grave as the side of a house.

"An' now what do you think of what I've brought ye?" asks Peter presently. The question is legalized, as Mrs. Vancourt, who has attacked the plate given her, is now silent over it—a splendid sign.

"It's a dream!" says she.

"Oh! so glad you like it," says Peter, standing now on one leg *now on the other* in the exuberance of his pride.

"Would you believe that it was *I* who suggested that 'dream' to Lady Saggartmore? It is a French conception! The French are so—er—enchantin', don't ye think so? So satisfyin'—eh? It was quite a favourite dish with me when I was in Paris! I thought it most comfortin'. Such a pleasure to meet somebody in the old country who knows what she's eatin'. For the rest, I do assure you, me dear Mrs. Vancourt, that they are generally quite content with the roast of beef—the leg of mutton—the bailed fowl—the horrible," with hands uplifted in the latest French style, "Bailed fowl."

"Horrible!" says Mrs. Vancourt.

"I hate it!" says Peter.

"So do aii—" says Mrs. Vancourt.

This, in some way, disposes of Peter.

"How unkind of you," says Eusebius. "That plate you have before you was meant for someone else, and yet you, having purloined it, are rude to the original owner."

"Who was it meant for? For that 'rival' of mine you spoke of just now?"

She has abandoned all interest in Peter's edible gift, and is now staring at Eusebius with eyes widely awake.

"Did I speak of a rival? Surely not one of flesh and blood?"

"Oh! let us have none of that," says she, frowning. "I am in earnest. Flesh and blood! What has that got to do with it?"

"Not much in this case," says Eusebius, who, after all, cannot resist the sense of humour that for ever masters him.

"Ah! I see!" says she.

"I expect you saw it a long time ago," says Eusebius, equably. "You might have seen it even sooner but for *her*. You have not noticed it perhaps, but, as a fact, she is endowed with a strong percentage of that 'Kam' of which Bret Harte speaks so feelingly in one of his inimitable tales. She does not wear her heart upon her sleeve for *you* to peck at. She is hard to move. *That* gives her the *cachet* that distinguishes her."

"How you admire her!" says Mrs. Vancourt. She looks at him and adds slowly—viciously—"How you *love* her!"

"To love her is a liberal education," says Eusebius in his

immovable way. "We have all learned that. *I* am only one amongst the many. I am a mere nobody, in fact. You,"—he pauses, perhaps to give emphasis to his words—"You, who know all things, know also the man who is at this moment at her feet."

"Why yes, I do," says she. But she turns very pale, "It is *you*," says she.

"Tut!" says he. "Have I not told you I am nobody? Am I beside her then? The man who loves a woman is always beside her when circumstances permit. See, who is beside her now?"

Mrs. Vancourt looks at him for a second with dilated eyes, and then follows his gaze. It takes her to the other side of the room, where Nora, Carnegie *and* Ferris are standing together round a small, oval table.

"Well?" says she, collecting herself, but with an effort, and looking at Eusebius with a supercilious eye.

"Well—it is not Carnegie," says he.

"Oh! who can tell?"

"*I* can!"

"I daresay you are a judge!"

"I daresay I am. For one thing, see how he looks at her!"

"Who?"

"Ferris. My dear Mrs. Vancourt, you are a friend of both, as I have heard, why should I not speak? See for yourself how Ferris looks at Miss Carew."

She does see evidently. She grows so silent, so white, indeed, that Eusebius becomes uneasy.

"The cat may look at the king, after all," says he. He had hoped to help her out of a difficulty, but he is electrified by her answer. She turns upon him a cool, calculating glance. There is nothing of agitation, or anger, or despair in it.

"In this instance," says she smiling, "I think it is the king who is looking at the cat!"

"Do you mean Miss Carew by that?" asks Eusebius with a sudden frown. "If so, I think you take a wrong reading of the whole affair. Perhaps, though you *are* a friend as I have said of both, you have not grasped the real meaning of the friendship that exists between Ferris and Miss Carew; you may perhaps indeed be unaware that Ferris is desperately in love with Miss Carew?"

"I certainly am unaware of it," says she. She is smiling. She draws up her long suède glove, and caresses it into shape.

"If they were to marry, should you be aware of it then?" says Eusebius, who is conscious of a slight feeling of irritation.

"Oh, *then!*" she smiles freshly and taps his arm with her fan. "I shall never be aware of it," says she.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

"Lay me in my hollow bed,
Grow the shamrocks over me,
Three in one, one in three,
Faith, and hope, and charity.
Peace, and rest, and silence be
With me where you lay my head!
O, dear the shamrocks are to me!"

"No! No more lies! Do you *hear?* Do you think I can't read you?" She turns to him a face absolutely transfigured by rage. "Do you think I did not notice your expression—and *hers*—as you came up those balcony steps an hour ago? Am I blind—a fool?"

It is two hours later. And now all the rooms are quite deserted. The guests have gone, the music is hushed, the flowers lie dead, or dying. Poor flowers! plucked to grace a little moment in our lives, and then to be cast out—unloved and unremembered.

In here, in the library, the lights are still burning, although, through the closed curtains, the first cold gleams of day are stealing. Mrs. Vancourt, standing before Ferris, with her little fragile figure actually trembling with anger, is looking white, haggard, beneath these first trying struggles of the coming day.

"Read me! Why should you not read me?" says Ferris. He is nearly as white as she is, however. Though this scene had been prevented by Eusebius Brush some hours ago, he always knew it was bound to come sooner or later. He had done his best to avoid it to-night, but Mrs. Vancourt had elected otherwise, and he had little chance against her in any way when once she had set her mind upon a thing. He knew this. He knows it always. It is, *perhaps*, one of the reasons why he so devoutly dislikes *her*.

"Ah! why, indeed? What a loathsome hypocrite you are, Cyril," says Mrs. Vancourt, with most commendable openness. "And yet what an idiot! You think I know nothing—*nothing!* That I am a poor, fond fool—hoodwinked by you!—by *you!* I tell you," stamping her foot upon the floor with violent passion, "it is you who are the fool! and I who have *not* been hoodwinked, but have borne with you as long as I was able. But I shall bear no more. I shall not stand being told to my face—that you love—that girl!"

"What girl?"

Mrs. Vancourt regards him closely, unpleasantly closely, for a moment or two. She is by nature very vulgar, but just now she is also very much in earnest. The earnestness and the vulgarity combined produce her answer.

"You make me sick!" says she slowly, and oh! the contempt of her tone. In spite of himself, it unnerves him. It is a finishing stroke indeed, as he has so much to unnerve him already that he has not strength for more. If Eldon Vancourt throws him over, nothing on earth lies before him but absolute, unredeemable poverty. He is in debt up to his eyes. He has no prospects. Even to *live*—to *eat*, he would be reduced to that worst of all things to his species, *work!* No wonder his heart sinks within him.

"I suppose you mean Nora Carew," says he sullenly. "I came up those steps with her. Well, what of it?"

"That's what I want to know," says his small Nemesis promptly. "What were you doing out there in the garden with her? What were you saying to her? Look here, Cyril, I've not forbidden you up to *this*—to speak to—that girl—but when it comes to Mr. Brush's telling me that you are desperately in love with her—why, then I draw the line! I'm not going to be made a laughing stock of by you—or any man. D'ye hear?"

"I hear," doggedly. "Am I to understand then that you object to my talking to *any* girl?"

"Stick to the point," says she. "I am talking of Nora Carew—of no other girl on earth."

"But why Miss Carew in particular?" asks he, with a last lame attempt at being in ignorance of all of which she is accusing him. It is a fatal effort on his part. It rouses once more the demon of jealousy within her. She had

talked herself almost into calmness, but now she bursts forth again.

"You must be *mad* to talk to me like that!" cries she furiously. "Do you imagine that I know nothing? That no word of your secret meetings with that girl have reached me; of your philanderings with her beside that silly stream at the end of her wood? Hah!" with a sharp intonation, "*that* touches you, eh?"

He has coloured, and drawn back involuntarily. That little river, almost sacred to him once—his meetings with Nora. Has she set spies upon him?

"I tell you," continues she, her words running from her with the rapidity of lightning, "I know more than that—more than you imagine. I know all—*all*! You have no silly girl to deal with *here*, Cyril!" laying her hand upon her breast, "but with a woman who will understand now, *at once*, what you intend doing."

"What do you want to understand?" asks he, clearing his throat.

"How it is to be with us from this hour. How it is to be with her and me also. It is in your hands, *you* shall decide. Take five minutes to decide, and put the case well before you. You," with a cruel smile, "can marry her, and starve, or," coarsely, "you can marry me, and *live*!"

It is a terrible moment. Ferris is so far decently bred and cultured that the hideous vulgarity of the little, soft refined-looking woman before him, shocks him to his very soul. At this instant he loathes her; but above the loathing, and strong enough to overpower it, lies his desire for wealth, for show, for ease. His own soul, in spite of his birth, is very vulgar too!

Mrs. Vancourt, as if to give him his five minutes, has gone to the window nearest her, and deliberately drawn aside the curtains. A flood of cold, sad light flows in. The windows are open, the air is very chill, but to Mrs. Vancourt the swift sweep of the morning wind is sweet, although it beats upon her naked arms and bosom.

She lifts her eyes, and above them in the lightening heavens the clouds, white and grey, are tinged with a growing pink. The moon is still here, but faint and *dying*, killed, conquered by the great god, Sun. A piercing, golden ray of his, mounting the far hill, declares the coming of *the day*.

The garden, moist with dew, lies still sleeping. The delicate perfumes from it rise and stir the tender, new-born air, and, mingling with it, spreads broadly, north and south, sweets manifold.

To Eldon Vancourt all these joys are as though they never had been. She sees, she feels, none of them. Her heart is on fire—a growing sense of anger dulls her perceptions. She has one thought only and that is for vengeance on the girl who has dared to dispute with her the affections of the man she loves.

She has told herself for three years that she loves Ferris, yet there are, and have been, moments when she is doubtful as to how far she regards him above his fellows. She is quite aware that his coming awakes within her a pleasureable excitement, and that a suspicion of his constancy enrages her; but beyond that—

Just now a doubt is troubling her. A doubt as to whether this game she is playing is worth the candle. But she puts it from her. She will conquer Nora! At all events Nora shall never conquer *her*. That girl shall never marry Ferris! There is madness in this thought. To be defeated—cast aside, for a little, silly country girl, who has seen nothing of life—to whom life at its best is a hidden mystery—*No!*

She rouses herself, and leaning over the balcony takes a look round her. It is brighter now, gayer. There is more light; and even as she looks a sound breaks upon her ears.

The song of birds! The glad, sweet song of larks and linnets—the music of thrushes. Unconsciously—for her soul is too poorly nurtured to care for the music of nature—the exquisite sweetness of the hour enters into her—mixed with the tender rushings of the river down there below, and the swellings of the velvet winds.

Suddenly she feels a hand upon her arm. It is Cyril's. She had given him five minutes to decide—but within that time he had decided. To commit suicide is folly. Therefore one must live. And to live uncomfortably—that would mean life with Nora Carew, although he loves her. No—impossible. He will marry Eldon Vancourt, although he *hates* her!

"Well?" says she. There is a sudden glow of triumph in her eyes. "You have come to say——"

"That you distrust me," says he.

"Thoroughly," replies she promptly. She knows him perfectly, and to give in to him *now*, at the supreme moment, might be, perhaps, to lose her point, and give him to her rival for ever.

"Eldon! Have you considered the meaning of your words?" says he, with the idea of gaining time.

"Considered it! I have, indeed!" She has flung his arm from her, and now comes back from the open window to the middle of the room. He follows her. "I have considered it for many months! I have considered it sufficiently to know that I cannot now withdraw from——" She pauses.

"From—what?"

"My engagement to you."

"Ah! That is good news," says he, with a smile, meant to be joyful; but his tone belies it.

"Is it? Are you sure? Is there no other engagement?"

"Are you mad?" asks he.

His face is so ghastly, that she puts up her hand.

"No other then?" There is a strange mockery in the glance she gives him. "Yet Mr. Brush gave me to understand as much. He hinted at an engagement between you and that little Carew girl. He was as insulting as he could be—— He," clenching her hands—"meant to be insulting. However, there is comfort in all things." She breaks off, and bursts into a low, nasty little laugh. "*He* is in love with her too! And I am glad of it," vindictively. "Because she will not look at him. Never—Never!"

"Never!" says Ferris hastily—madly—unthinkingly.

"Ah!" says she. It is a sudden exclamation; she pauses looking at him. It was an opening, but she does not follow it up; why, she could hardly have explained, even to herself. But she buries that passionate, *sure* "Never," amongst other things, to be recollected on a future day.

"Eusebius Brush detests me, nearly as much as I detest him," says Ferris calmly. "No doubt he has told you things about me, that were meant to lower me in your opinion——"

"And raise the little Carew girl. Probably. As I have said, he is in love with Nora. But, I have determined upon putting all he said behind me. I have gone too far

with you, Cyril, to give you up now—whatever,” with a queer smile—“I should like to do. My friends—not our friends here—our friends in England—have congratulated me too often on my coming marriage with you, to allow of any rupture between us. Besides which—I am not going to let that girl triumph over me.”

She could not triumph over you.” He forced himself to utter this.

And it is so true too. There will indeed be no triumph for Nora—all her grace, all her beauty, all her sweetness, cannot outweigh the golden charms of her rival!

“People say otherwise!” a sneer curling her lip.

“People! Eusebius Brush!” with an attempt at scorn.

“Are you going to take his word against mine?”

“Oh! as for *that*!” Her tone is so contemptuous that the dark blood mounts to his brow. A sudden desire to give her back insult for insult—to tell her what he thinks of her, how he loathes her—almost overcomes him; but not quite. In time he remembers, and stands silent. It is so well to remember, when one’s interests are at stake!

“We will leave your word out of the question,” says she. “I have told you that I decline to be regarded by my friends as—*jilted*, to use an ugly word; but there is another, a stronger, reason why I keep to my engagement with you.” She pauses—and, looking at him, grows suddenly very pale. “It is strange,” she goes on, in a low tone. “It is so strange to myself, that at times it hints to me of madness—but—I love you!”

CHAPTER XXXIX.

“The hour is past to fawn or crouch
As suppliants for our right.”

“But on the cause must go, midst joy, or weal, or woe.”

“ELDON!” He makes a movement towards her, and holds out his hand. She brings her fan down upon it, with such venom, such passionate force, that the pretty toy of tortoise-shell and lace falls broken to the ground.

“Stand back,” says she hoarsely. “Is *this* a moment in which to endure your caresses! I tell you, that the love I feel for you is of so strange a nature, that sometimes I cannot be sure myself whether it *is* love—or that stronger

feeling still, called hate. I doubt—I doubt about it—but some day I shall know—and *soon*. But,” vehemently—“there is one thing about which I have no doubt at all, and that is, that I despise and detest myself for ever having loved you !”

“The remedy is in your own hands,” says he sullenly.

“Would it be a relief to you ?” She laughs aloud—a bitter laugh. “No, I shall not use that remedy ; though I know I should have a full revenge on you if I did so. You dread poverty—you desire money—you shall have it ; and with it”—a curious light in her eyes—“*Me !* Be comforted, you shall have the spending of my dead husband’s money—to a certain extent. You shall have your house in town—your country seat—your shooting—horses—all that your soul desires. But—” she pauses, and fixes him with her clear, pale, blue eyes, that now seem almost white—“you shall purchase it all. You shall give up Nora Carew.”

“You seem *mad* on that point !” cries he violently ; his hand is still stinging with the pain of the blow she had given it. Such a tiny hand to give so fierce a wound—so fragile a form to contain so strong a will !

“I am never mad,” says she icily. “You will go to that girl to-morrow—and put an end finally to your— How shall we call it ?” with a mocking intonation—“Your *friendship* with her !”

“Lady Saggartmore has arranged that I shall drive her to Courtown to-morrow.”

“You shall break that arrangement. It will be little trouble to you. You, who are so famous at excuses, can surely invent one more to please the woman you are going to marry. You will see Miss Carew to-morrow ! Do you hear ?”

“I hear !” There is a touch of revolt on his handsome, weak, false face that does not escape her.

“Does that mean that you will not heed ?” She takes a step towards him—she is trembling with rage—she runs her fingers in a quick, sharp fashion through her beautiful, loose, red hair. “You *shall* heed,” says she fiercely. “You shall see that girl, and put an end to everything between you. On that consideration alone—I shall—*spare her reputation !*”

“Her—*reputation !*” His eyes now are blazing.

"Yes, is it so sweet, so pure a thing that one dare not even mention it? Do you think my *breath* can tarnish it? What of all those secret meetings between you and her, those tender moonlight assignations. Ah! as I told you before, you thought me a mere tool in your hands—a blind fool—to be caressed and managed, and kept in the dark! But all through, I have *known*, and I have waited—waited to set my foot upon her neck!"

("And upon yours," was almost on her tongue, but she checked herself; it would not do to defeat her purpose now. She will see it out—to the end—the end that shall be bitter for both.)

"Oh no, *I* was not the fool," says she. "It was Miss Carew! The *sainted Nora*!" Here she laughs. "The angel who, unknown to her household, creeps out at midnight to meet her lover, who——"

Whatever other cruel words she was going to utter in her rage and jealousy, die in her throat. Ferris has caught her by both arms and is now shaking her violently. A man who can only love a woman in a half-hearted, selfish fashion, is just the sort of man to be rough to any other woman who may chance to upset his temper.

"It is a lie!" says he in a low, but hoarse tone. "A lie! I *never* saw her alone—never! I swear it!" Perhaps a last remnant of grace towards the poor child he has made so miserable, through her young, honest, healthy belief in him, stirs him now to a passion of her. Perhaps too, Mrs. Vancourt's late declared intention of sticking to her engagement with him, despite of all vague hints as to his constancy, has given him courage to protest. "I never saw her without her sister—without Sophie Carew. It is a lie, I tell you."

"Do you mean that *I* am lying. Take care," says she in a dangerous tone.

He recovers himself at once. He lets her go, and finds to his surprise that he is reeling backwards. He catches the arm of a chair and steadies himself. He is quite clear in a second. It was evident the strain of the last moments had told upon him.

"Look here!" says he, laughing quite naturally. "What does it all come to? Nothing!" he says this with persistence in his manner. "Nothing really. We have had a row or two before, Eldon, in the old days, but

what did *they* come to either? you can't do without me, and——"

He stops. Eldon has burst out laughing—there is nothing bitter in this laugh, however, it is filled with genuine amusement.

"Go on—go on," cries she.

"And I," says she, a little damped perhaps by that impromptu laugh, but still firm in his hope, "and I—cannot live without you." He throws a quite lover-like look into his eyes as he says this.

"*True!*" says she; she laughs almost violently now. "So you think you cannot *live* without me?—*Live!*" There is bitter sarcasm in her tone. Then suddenly she changes it. Her glance grows very mild. "You really mean it?" asks she prettily, standing back from him, however, but smiling very sweetly. "That you can't live without me! Ah! I almost believe it!"

Is there satire in her light eyes?

"You *should* believe it!" says he frowning. "To dispute it, is to dispute my love for you." He quite looks the lover as he says this. He has evidently entered *con amore* into his part. "If I have been a little rough to you, Eldon, you must blame yourself. I cannot stand this disbelief in me. For four years I have been your—slave—I am content to be so still. I can say no more."

"Well—perhaps I was wrong," says she, in a silky little tone. She smiles. Her smile as well as her tone is as silky as possible. "You see," giving him her hand—at a distance however—"that I acknowledge my fault—that I still trust to you! and to prove it"—she presses his hand here, and smiles again—"I shall remind you of what I spoke to you about a few minutes ago. About that little Nora Carew—you know what I wish about that. And you—will do it?"

"Your wish is my law!"

"Does that ambiguous answer mean 'yes'?" with a slight tightening of her lips.

"Yes," says he. It seems to him as he says it, that he has given up his soul to the Evil One. But there is no room for temporizing—it is too late to play with the question. His Fate, small but inexorable, is standing before him, watching him with a mocking eye. "Yes." The word falls from him, and with it, falls all hope of love for evermore.

CHAPTER XL.

"I would I were on yonder hill,
'Tis there I'd sit and cry my fill,
And every tear would turn a mill,
Is go de tu mo murnin slán."

NORA had bidden her stepmother good-night in the hall and had smiled a little refusal at Sophie, who had said something about talking it all over in her bedroom. "She was tired, she had danced too much, it was daylight, she *should* get an hour or two of sleep," excuses came languidly but eagerly from her pale lips.

"Yes, bed—bed is the place for you," said Miranda kindly, giving her a gentle, if energetic, push towards the staircase. "You have been enjoying yourself too much, that's the fact, you are now paying for it."

Nora had glanced at her, Sophie had seen the glance and it disturbed her. "Yes, now I am paying for it," repeated Nora, with a laugh that rang falsely. She turned then, and went up the stairs. Sophie could see that her steps were languid, but she could not see the expression of her face. But somehow, she made a picture of it in her mind; and the picture frightened her.

She in turn bid Miranda good-night, kissing her affectionately; there was something about the big, loud, vulgar woman that appealed to both her and Nora. That Miranda liked them was not to be doubted, a charm in itself; and something about her that spoke of affection denied her all her life, a sense of loneliness with all her wealth, softened their young hearts towards her.

It is half-an-hour later. Sophie in her own room, removing her pretty ball-gown, and laying aside her dainty gloves and fan, and putting Dennis's exquisite bouquet of flowers into water, is haunted all the time by that strange glance of Nora's. What misery there was in it! what had happened? She had seen, of course, that Ferris had scarcely danced with her—it might be that—it *must* be that; poor old darling! What a horrible pity that she had set her affections on that odious, false, *cruel* creature! As

for his being handsome! A tall, melancholy, long-nosed man! Give *her* a man like——

Why had Nora refused to talk the dance over with her? Dances in Ballysaggart are so few and far between, that to talk them over afterwards, seems to be almost a necessity. Of course, Cyril had hurt her in some way; oh! if *only* she could be brought to see him in his true light, and—to see another also, in *his* true light!

Here it occurs to Sophie again that there is something on her mind that must be worked off. To sleep with it still unrevealed would be impossible. It is a rather guilty little secret—a sort of confession that she feels bound to make; but to disturb Nora *now*. Miranda had said she was to go to bed—that sleep was necessary to her. Perhaps, however, even in bed, she might not be yet asleep, and——

She steals softly out of her own room in her dressing-gown, and crossing the corridor, gently turns the handle of Nora's door. *Very* gently, lest she should awaken her. The door opens—gradually, silently—and Sophie looking in, sees in the pale light of the glorious morning—Nora!

Nora! still clad in her evening-gown. Nora! just as she was half-an-hour ago in the hall, except that the long *suede* gloves have been torn from her arms, and that those pretty naked arms are supporting her bowed head. The window has been flung wide open as though on entering the room she had gasped for air. She is sitting before a table, her face hidden prone, prostrate. She is quite motionless—no sobs are shaking her slight frame, but the whole attitude is suggestive of grief too great almost to be borne.

Sophie terrified, standing still upon the threshold, hardly knows what to do—whether to advance or go back again. Then a fearful doubt crosses her mind, she takes a step forward. The *extreme* quietude of the figure has sickened her with fear.

“Nora!” says she sharply.

Nora springs to her feet.

“I told you—I *told* you, I did not want you to-night,” cries she angrily. Then suddenly checking herself—“You unnerved me,” says she, with a most miserable attempt at composure. “I was *so* tired, I believe,” laughing, “I had almost fallen asleep at this table.”

“Why do you treat me like this, Nolly?” says Sophie, reproachfully—tears in her eyes. “Can’t I help you at all?”

Who have we got in all the world but each other? Don't close your heart against *me*, Nora!"

"I am a wretch," says Nora impulsively. She holds out her arms to Sophie, and presses her to her, and kisses her fondly.

"You are unhappy, darling?" says Sophie, very softly.

"Yes. If you *will* make me speak." The words come from her slowly, reluctantly—she turns away, and walks to the window.

"It is about Cyril?"

"A wise guess. Who is there," bitterly, "except Cyril, who *could* make me unhappy?"

"Nora," Sophie follows her to the window. "If you think that, why—*why* don't you break with him?"

"What an absurd—what a useless question," returns Nora, with a frown that is born of pain.

"Why useless? There are others."

"Others?"

"Mr. Carnegie, I mean—he——" she pauses, checked by something in Nora's face.

"Go on," imperiously. "He——?"

"He too, loves you," says Sophie, a little nervously.

"That is not it," says Nora quickly. "You have more to say. *Say* it. He has been speaking to you? What did he say? You have come here to tell me about it, Sophie, therefore do it at once."

"He asked me to-night if I thought there was any chance for him."

"Chance for him?"

"With you? With regard to your marrying him?"

"Well?" almost violently. The fragile body is indeed trembling with fear and despair, and anger.

"Well—I said nothing," says Sophie, which perhaps is not *all* the truth.

"Then you should have said something. You! who *knew*! You, who know how it is with me. Do you think I could ever love again?"

"I don't see why you shouldn't," says Sophie, stoutly.

"Don't you? I wish Denis could hear you say that." She laughs aloud, as if in mockery. Then suddenly her whole expression changes. "Does *no* one really love, I wonder?" says she, in a voice of anguish. "No one but *me*?" She leaves the window, and begins to pace restlessly

up and down the room. "Oh, what pain it is—what pain!" murmurs she, pressing her hands against her breast as though the pain was there.

The cold, calm light of the growing day is rushing in through the open window, bathing everything in its chilly rays. The heavens are brightening, and rose-hued clouds far over there, are spreading themselves across the brow of the hill. Bird is calling to bird—there is stir and life and movement, everywhere in the sweet awakening world—and here—here, where this little, white-clad figure is moving restlessly from door to casement and back again, there is life too—but life at its saddest.

"Mr. Carnegie loves you, Nora. He loves you," says Sophie, whose heart is bleeding for her.

"Well, it is no use. Tell him that. Do you hear, Sophie? Tell him it is no use at all. If he loves me—if he suffers as I suffer—I am sorry for him—but that is all. I cannot return his love—I shall never love again."

"But Nora, darling——"

Nora turns upon her; her small sweet face afire.

"Tell him that that only," says she.

"I shall tell him," says Sophie, sighing.

"Just fancy!" says Nora, pausing in her rapid walk, and looking at Sophie with distressed eyes. "He has told Sir Fell too. Sir Fell, of *all* people! That was a very deliberate action, I think."

"Deliberate? How?"

"You know very well; he wished to prevent a chance of a refusal. He told Sir Fell—he told you—Heaven alone knows how many other people he has told, of his hateful desire to marry me. It seems to me," feverishly, "as though he were determined to cry it aloud from the house-tops."

"But surely, Nolly darling, all that argues for him—for his honest love for you, I mean."

That word "honest" maddens poor Nora. The other—has *he* been honest?

"I don't care what argues for or against him," says she harshly, "I shall never marry him, not though Sir Fell and Fate itself gave me to him. I hate him, I think!"

"Oh, Nora!"

"Yes. I do hate him," quickly, "if only because he loves me. Why should *he* be the one to love me?"

She stops short, horrified at the fear that she has betrayed herself. "When Cyril will not love me," had been on her lips, at her heart: Love,

"The bitter sweet, the honey blent with gall,"

is destroying all the sweetness, and brightness, and beauty of her.

"We all love you, Nolly," says Sophie, very sadly.

"Do you? I don't seem to care now whether you do or not," says Nora. She has ceased her troubled pacing of the room, and going to the open window looks out upon the lovely morn.

The sun is just breaking through the clouds and on the top of the far hill a rosy gleam is spreading. Nora's eyes dwell upon it such sad, wide young eyes, without a touch of hope in them.

Sophie cannot bear to look at her.

"Nolly, wouldn't it be better if you talked right out to me?" says she. "You are in grief—you are unhappy. It would be folly on my part to say I don't know the cause of it. I"—delicately, and very nervously—"noticed that Cyril did not dance much with you to-night."

"How could he dance much with me?" says Nora, facing her suddenly, like a little fury. "Would he expose me to the anger of Sir Fell? Be just, Sophie, even if you *do* detest Cyril!"

"I am not unjust," says Sophie, hotly. "If it was Sir Fell who compelled him to refrain from dancing with you, I can only say that Mrs. Vancourt is to be congratulated—*she* has no step-father!"

Sophie had lost her temper. In another second she is penitent. Nora's pale face is even paler now. She leans a little heavily against the side of the window.

"You are cruel!" says she, in a voice that is almost a whisper. "You say things that cut me to the heart, and yet you tell me you love me!"

"Nora, I am sorry, I am *dreadfully* sorry! I should not have said that. But—am I to be silent always, and see you suffer? I distrust Cyril—I cannot help it. I know you will always hate me, for that alone but I *must* speak. And, indeed, it is better that you should hate me than be wretched for all your life!"

"Why should I be wretched? Because," passionately, "Cyril loves me?"

"No," in a low tone, but firmly. "Because he does *not* love you."

"Sophie——"

"Not as you should be loved."

"That means, only—'not as Mr. Carnegie loves you.' Well, I don't want to be loved by your Mr. Carnegie. I want to be loved where I love again. Sophie—to-morrow evening he has asked me to meet him down by the old bridge." She pauses. "The old bridge—the old place—shall I ever forget it I wonder—shall I—*have* to forget——?"

Her face grows ghastly. Sophie, thinking she is going to faint, takes her into her arms.

"You will come with me, Sophie?" asks she, leaning against her sister's bosom. She puts up her hand and takes Sophie's.

"Of course, darling. Of *course*! Oh, Nora! Where would I *not* go with you?"

"Then that is settled," says Nora, softly. She is silent for a time. It seems a long, long time to Sophie. But presently she speaks.

"Dear—*dear* Sophie," says she. "Sophie, you will never know how I love you! It is so hard to be nice when one is unhappy. And sometimes, Sophie—I wish—I often wish—that I was dead!"

"Oh! Nora! Oh! *Darling*! No. No. Oh, *don't* say that," says Sophie. She clings to her little, pretty sister and bursts into tears. Tears are so new to Sophie, that now, seeing her sobbing, Nora, in turn, grows frightened. Sophie! who *never* cries!

"Sophie—Sophie! Think—It would be best"

She breaks down here. Most mercifully, the sight of Sophie's tears have given her tears of her own. She abandons herself to the grief that is consuming her, and sobs bitterly in Sophie's arms.

CHAPTER XLI.

" I pity her who never more will know
Contentment here below ;

* * * * *

" But weep for one whose bitter wail
Is poured upon the gale,
Like the shrill bird that flutters nigh
The nest where its crushed offspring lie."

SIR FELL had been much exercised in mind over Carnegie's proposal for Nora. Nora's mother's will had given him complete control over Nora and her sister until the girls should be twenty-five, and after that too—a fact unknown to the girls. They had believed themselves emancipated from all control on their twenty-fifth birthday ; but, as a fact, Sir Fell can refuse his consent to any marriage they may choose to contract, until the hour of his death, unless it meets his views.

Now, Carnegie's proposal suits his views altogether. St. John Carnegie has given Sir Fell to understand that he wants no fortune with Nora. That the five or six thousand that belong to Nora may be allowed to lie fallow, and enrich her sister. And as Sir Fell can always refuse his permission to Sophie to wed with the impecunious Denis, and as the two five or six thousands can always bring in to Sir Fell a certain percentage, it is plain to see that he considers Carnegie—of all men—the most desirable as a husband for Nora.

* * * * *

" Sophie, he has sent for me. He wants to see me in the library," says Nora, in a frightened tone, coming suddenly into her sister's room. It is the next day, and now close upon noon.

" Well, even if he does, it can't be with the design of eating you," says Sophie. " There, take courage, Nolly ! Was there ever so chicken-hearted a baby ? If—if"—searchingly—" you *have* made up your mind to refuse Mr. Carnegie—why do you refuse him, and with spirit. Though I confess, Noll, my own heart sinks when I think of your doing so. But there !—we've had enough of that."

"He can be so very violent," says Nora, faintly—who, however, is alluding to Sir Fell. "He givee me a feeling of faintness—*here!*"—laying her hand upon her heart, which indeed is beating violently. "There will be a tussle," says she.

"But the weakest won't go to the wall, I can see," says Sophie, regretfully. "You will fight your battle to the bitter end—and you will gain——"

"Love!" says Nora, with soft, shining eyes. "Ah! you give me true couage, Sophie."

"Then, like the parrot, I'm sorry I spoke," says Sophie, grumpily. "I'm not at all sure it was for your benefit. However, if you *will* burn your boats, do so with a high head. Give him to understand, once for all, that the days for chains and 'donjon keeps,' and bread and water and thumb-screws are at an end." She sighs—"More's the pity," says she.

"Why? Do you want to see me tortured?" asks Nora, with a nervous laugh. "Ah! you are a queer pleader. You plead both sides. There! I must go—but I do so dread him—the ordeal. "Surely," pathetically, "I was born under an unlucky star."

Sophie refrains from replying. Truly, to her too, it seems that there is truth in her sister's words—though she would give them a wider, a weightier significance. It is unlucky enough, perhaps, to be made the object of Sir Fell's wrath for half an hour or so, but surely it is unluckier far to cling to a love that is basely untrue, and reject another that is honesty itself. Yet she cannot bring herself to expostulate further with Nora, who is at this moment the very picture of misery. The sword of Damocles, that has trembled for so long a time within an inch of the lovely soft Grecian roll of sunny hair that adorns her charming head, is now about to fall.

She is looking at Sophie as if so expecting an answer to her last remark, that Sophie finds herself compelled to say something.

"Well, move, move!" cries she. "Get from under it. Why stand still beneath misfortune?"

"Move! It is good advice. I shall 'move on' to the library and extermination," says Nora. She goes towards the door.

"Whatever you do—if you won't give in (how I wish

you *would*)—keep a high courage,” calls Sophie after her. And then, “Shall I come with you?”

“No, no.”

The little martyr to love—the unhappy Princess—goes reluctantly down the stairs, and across the hall to the library, where her Ogre she knows is awaiting her. In fear and trembling she goes, and like Agag “delicately.” She moves, indeed, on tip-toe, and very slowly, as though afraid of hearing her own footsteps. Certainly, she is afraid that *he* may hear them. She feels as though she is going to her execution.

Even as she reaches the door, a sound above her head startles her almost into a cry. She looks up to see Sophie (who has decided upon giving her a last word of exhortation), suspending half her body over the banisters, and craning her neck still further, at the imminent risk of breaking it.

“Give it to him, Nora,” whispers she frantically. “Don’t spare him! Don’t get frightened, whatever you do! Keep your eye well on his! He hates eyes! And, above all, keep on talking. *Yell* at him if necessary.”

It is unfortunate that, in her excitement, born of her desire for her sister’s victory over the common enemy, she too yells—a *little*. There is a sudden rasping noise in the library, as of a chair suddenly and indignantly pushed back, and immediately afterwards the door is flung open.

Sophie, with a smothered exclamation, withdraws from her poise on the banisters, and Nora looks with terrified eyes into Sir Fell’s wrathful ones.

“Who was talking out there? I forbid talking in this part of the house when I am writing. But *my* wishes are the last to be respected in this house. Walk in, Nora.” To poor Nora this sounds like the old and treacherous invitation from the spider to the fly. She obeys, and hears, with a feeling of despair, the heavy bang of the door behind her.

“You are no doubt aware of the matter on which I wish to speak with you,” says Sir Fell, with the hatefully-pompous manner he affects at times. “An honour—a *great* honour has been paid you. I hope you are duly sensible of it.”

“You mean——” stammers Nora, who knows only too well what he means.

"I mean that Mr. Carnegie—a man of standing, birth, wealth and position—has condescended to ask your hand in marriage."

This insulting prologue gives to Nora, not only the small amount of courage that Nature has allowed her, but something more.

"I do not understand that word—condescended," says she.

"Do you not?" says Sir Fell calmly. "Let me then explain it to you." He pauses to cross one leg comfortably over the other. "It means that *you*, an insignificant, almost penniless girl—a girl without anything whatsoever to recommend her so far as *I* can see—an ignorant girl, devoid of everything except," emphatically and crushingly, "an exceedingly bad temper, has had the unprecedented good luck to attract a man who is in every sense your superior."

"He is so far my superior, by your account," says Nora bitterly, "that—I feel myself bound to refuse him."

"What do you mean?" says Sir Fell, losing all at once his judicial air, and glaring at her as though the little fragile creature before him is a fiend.

"I mean," in a low tone, "that I shall not marry Mr. Carnegie."

"Pshaw!" says Sir Fell insolently. "What have you got to do with it? I tell you *I* have accepted him. *I* have told him you will marry him. Go back to your room, girl, and study how to behave as the wife of a man so desirable in all respects as Carnegie."

"I shall not marry him. I shall not marry him," says Nora, trembling—*shivering* indeed, with fright, but constant to her love for Cyril. Alas! how sad a constancy!

"You defy me?" cries Sir Fell. "Hah!" This last exclamation comes like a snort from his annoyed nostrils. "This arises out of your idiotic fancy for that immoral young fool, Cyril Ferris, I suppose?"

"You are wrong," says Nora. "It comes from nothing but the fact that I do not love Mr. Carnegie, and that therefore I shall not marry him."

"Ah! we shall see to that!"

"Yes, yes, you will see! Nothing—*nothing* could make me marry him," says the girl, standing before him with

clasped hands and a terribly strained expression on her young, sad face.

"Shall I see anything else then?" asks he, with a cruel, cynical smile. "Shall I—if I miss seeing this marriage—live to see another—your marriage to another; Ferris, for instance? I think not. I think I shall be the oldest man on record—I think," smiling still remorselessly, "I shall be a modern Methuselah when I see that day."

"Still, I shall not marry Mr. Carnegie," says Nora, in so low a tone that he just barely hears her. His doubt of the truth of Ferris has gone straight to her heart. It has strangled all her new-found courage in her. *His* doubt—is it not her own doubt?

"And I tell you, you *shall*," thunders Sir Fell, now losing all control over himself. "I have given my word to him—I shall see that it is honoured. Do you think a child like you can disarrange my plans?"

"I shall not marry him," says Nora again. Her frozen lips refuse to form a different reading of the same decision; but the decision rests, her faithful heart refuses to alter it in so much as one line.

Sir Fell, gazing at her with deadly wrath and hatred in his eyes, acknowledges the strength, the force in the small, pale, frightened face before him. He decides upon a slight change of tactics.

"Be rational, girl!" says he roughly, but more reasonably. "The world lies before you; grasp it while you can. Succumb to it, and it will bruise you body and soul; defy it, and it will lie grovelling at your feet. Fling off this penniless lover of yours, and take the good the gods provide you."

"It is dreadful—dreadful," says Nora. She puts up her hands to her head as if in pain. "I don't understand you. I know nothing."

"Then learn."

"I shall never learn from you. I——" she stops dead short. "I love Cyril," had been on her lips, but she compels herself to silence. "I am too old to learn," says she, with an effort continuing her sentence.

"You are not too old to know this!" says Sir Fell, rising angrily to his feet. "That you shall marry Carnegie before next Christmas. What! You would still cling to a man who is notoriously bound to another woman—to Ferris, to

whom congratulations on his marriage with Mrs. Vancourt are pouring in every day?"

"It is not true—not true," says the girl wildly. All her nervousness seems to have disappeared. "There is not one word of truth in it," says she. "Not one." Her beautiful eyes are afire; she flings back her head; a sort of madness has seized upon her, and now terror, even of this man, who has in so large a measure controlled her life, is forgotten by her. "You have invented it all—every word. He is not engaged to Mrs. Vancourt. I shall not listen to you again—not for another moment." She goes quietly to the door.

"Stay—I command you!" roars Sir Fell.

"No, no, no," says she, and opening the door, goes through it gently, quietly, without haste, thus defying him as she goes.

CHAPTER XLII.

"At the thought of the past, the tears gush from her eyes,
And the pulse of her heart makes her white bosom rise."

SIR FELL rings the bell violently. Nora's defiant departure has raised his temper to fury. He desires the servant who answers his intemperate summons to send to him Lady Anketell without delay. Miranda, coming to him almost immediately, is astonished out of her usual calm at his appearance.

"What's the matter?" asks she.

"Everything's the matter. That girl—that idiot has positively refused to accept Carnegie—she, a pauper, to dare——"

"She is not exactly a pauper," says Miranda, remindfully.

"Next door to it, anyway. Of course, if you are going to back up her folly, and tell her that she and that young fop, Ferris, can live in affluence on the interest of five thousand pounds, she will persist in this madness."

"I am not likely to back her up there," says Miranda calmly. "I detest Ferris; and besides, I know the value of money as much as"—drily—"you do!"

"If you don't encourage her in that way, you do in others," storms Sir Fell, talking very fast, with a view to

pretending he has not heard her last remark, which beyond doubt was not in good taste. "She has been insubordinate always, but since you have come here, both the girls have got completely demoralized; what with the extravagant views you are inculcating in them, and the deliberate fashion in which on all occasions you ignore me and my wishes, they are growing beyond all control!"

"If it's going to be one of your lectures on my behaviour," says Miranda, rising, "I give you to understand, my dear man"—laughing lightly—"that they always go off me, like water off the back of a duck. Ha! ha! There's an opening for you! Don't see it? Why you might pay me a compliment. Duck—eh?"

Really she is very intolerable. Sir Fell makes an indescribable gesture that seems to raise rather than lower her mirth.

"Here—come on," says she presently. "You want me to do something, don't you? Something about Nora—and her nonsense."

"I wished you to speak to her—to reason with her," says Sir Fell, solemnly. "But now, after this terrible outburst of vulgar levity, I hardly think you would be the person to win her over to a sense of her—er—duty."

"If *you* had a little more levity about you," says Miranda placidly, "you'd be a lot easier to live with. Of course, I'll speak to Nora. She'll mind me, maybe. Those girls are getting fond of me."

"They'd be fond of anyone who decked them out in silks and laces," says Sir Fell contemptuously.

"That isn't all, though," says Miranda. "We've cottoned to each other——" Here Sir Fell winces. "Yes, 'cottoned,'" persists she in even a louder tone. "What's the matter with that word? A first-rate one, I call it, and used by everyone."

"In *your* circle, I have no doubt," says Sir Fell with a sneer. "I should be greatly obliged to you if"—another sneer—"you could get Nora to—er—'cotton' to Carnegie!"

"I'll do my best. If only for the poor girl's own sake," says Miranda. "I mistrust that Ferris. Fast and loose is the game he is playing with her. And if she thinks he will wait for five or six years to get her small fortune, she makes a mistake, poor child."

"Why?"

"Because he is carrying on"—again Sir Fell shrinks as if hurt—"with that little Mrs. Vancourt—as big an imp as I know."

"Hah!" says Sir Fell. "I have seen something of that—but still I think if Nora's fortune were to be had, he would cling to Nora. However, if he waited for *ever*, he can never get that."

"How so?" asks Miranda quickly. "When she is twenty-five, she gets it, eh?"

"No!" says Sir Fell. "That is the popular belief I know. But, even at twenty-five, if I disapprove—if I have honest reasons for disapproving of the man she wishes to marry, I can still refuse to give her her five thousand pounds."

"Good Heavens, what an injustice!" says Miranda. "You are sure of this?"

"Perfectly! If you wish to see a copy of the will——"

"No! no!" says Miranda, who is sharp enough to see he is telling the truth. "Well, *she* wasn't much of a mother, anyway," says she, alluding, no doubt, to Nora's dead parent.

Sir Fell reddens angrily.

"I don't know what you mean. I don't see how she could be a better mother than by taking care that her children were not made a prey to moneyless adventurers. Would *you*, may I ask, sanction Nora's marriage with Mr. Ferris?"

"I was not thinking of Nora." Indeed, Miranda's thoughts have flown to Sophie and *her* love. Denis Butler is a favourite of Miranda's.

"Hah! you are thinking of that idler, Denis Butler," says he. "Well, I may as well say at once that I shall not give my consent to that marriage either. As you are about it, you may as well, when talking to Nora, give Sophia a hint to that effect."

"I shall do nothing of the kind," says Miranda, flouncing out of her chair, and looking a little bigger than usual. "Do your own dirty work yourself. For that's dirty work, let me tell you, Anketell. He is as good a fellow as ever stepped, and with a little help, such as Sophie's fortune, might manage to live happily enough."

"Your ideas and mine, as I think you already know, do

not agree," says Sir Fell icily. "It is useless to discuss the point. I shall thank you to go at once to Nora, and if possible influence her in the right direction."

"Well, I'll try," says Miranda, "though all I expect to gain by my interference is a rap over the knuckles."

"Good gracious! What hideous expressions," says Sir Fell peevishly, wrinkling up his forehead as if conscious of some unpleasant odour. "I thought you said the girl liked you?"

"Well enough to listen to me, but not so well as that scamp, Ferris," says she.

"Oh! scamp—scamp! Low word—*very* low!" says Sir Fell, shaking his head as if suffering.

"Ah! for goodness' sake, man, get sense!" says Miranda, prancing out of the room.

It would indeed be impossible to say whose disgust towards the other is the higher.

Miranda, going straight to Nora's room, taps at the door.

"Nora, are you here?" calls she.

"Yes," says Nora from within. She opens the door, and standing on the threshold, looks at Miranda with questioning eyes—sad eyes, that betray at once to Miranda the fact that the owner of them has been crying. Crying, and bitterly. The sorrowful, swollen lids, the dull, mournful orbs, the touch of sullen defiance in the whole young, small face, wakens all at once a very storm of sympathy in Miranda's ample bosom.

"Can't I come in?" says she, alluding to the way in which the girl is standing, blocking the doorway as it were.

"You can, of course," says Nora reluctantly. "But why?"

"Why? To talk to you," says Miranda. "To talk to you of what you'll hate certainly, but what will be for your good I hope."

"Oh! the same story in different words," says Nora desolately. "It will be no use for you, Miranda, none at all, I warn you of that. But you can come in, and talk if you like."

She casts herself—a little atom of humanity—looking, as Miranda thinks sorrowfully, smaller and more fragile than ever to-day—into the depths of a huge old armchair that seems to swallow her up.

"You are feeling rather low down in the world, aren't

you?" says Miranda, following her to the big chair and arranging a pillow fondly behind her moody little head. "And it's all your own fault, isn't it? I've come to tell you that. And it's hardly likely to be acceptable, eh?"

"You have come to tell me that I ought to give up Cyril and marry Mr. Carnegie," says Nora, as scorning any leading up to the matter in question.

"Now I like that," says Miranda genially. "It saves so much trouble. Nothing like coming to the point at once. Well, yes, my dear, I think the best day you'll ever see will be the day on which you give up Cyril, and marry Carnegie."

"I shall never marry Mr. Carnegie," says the girl, quietly enough, but with a sombre light in her beautiful eyes. "I have already told Sir Fell so. If he has sent you here as an ambassadress on the same subject, why, go back again and tell him your labour has been in vain."

"I sha'n't go yet," says Miranda, whose immovable good temper stands to her at all moments—"I sha'n't go till I have told you my opinion of Ferris—of Cyril, as I believe you call him. *Such* a name! Just like him, isn't it? Light—fantastical—finical—no grip in it."

"I like the name," says Nora. She is now sitting up, and her eyes, sombre up to this, are beginning to blaze. "'Light—fantastical—finical,'—you don't understand."

"I understand enough to know—" Miranda is quite undisturbed by this outburst—"To know that finical means small. Now I have told you, you shall hear my opinion of Ferris. *He* is small if you like. "I," snapping her fingers, "wouldn't give tuppence for him."

Miranda had meant to do the best she could for her cause, but ambassadresses such as Miranda generally do the worst. To abuse Cyril is fatal.

"I have said you didn't understand," says Nora, in a frozen sort of way. "How *could* you? You don't know him. All you think of is, that he has no money—to speak of—and that Mr. Carnegie has a great deal. Oh! you can see I have gone into it, but what puzzles me is, when it is only money that is in question, why you so object to Cyril on that score, and yet you uphold Denis Butler's engagement with Sophie. Now don't think—don't think—" in a terrified way, as if shocked at what she has said—"that I want to spoil Sophie's happiness. Oh! Miranda, not a

word to Sir Fell about it—not a word. Oh! you *won't* say a word?”

“Not half a one,” says Miranda. “What a little catherine wheel you are! There, sit down and let us talk this out.”

Nora sits down. It seems to her as though her brain has been suddenly rent in two. Will Miranda help her, or will she not? And even if she should help her, where shall she find herself? She feels as though she has no solid standing anywhere; like Mohammed's coffin, she seems to rest between earth and heaven. And heaven—*her* heaven! Alas! she is afraid to dwell upon that. Still he had said he loved her—to-night—to-night she will meet him, and then she will know—know that he loves her.

“For one thing,” says Miranda, who is sorely non-plussed, “Denis has a profession, Cyril has none. He is an idler on the face of the earth.”

“But——”

“Yes, yes, of course. Still it *is* ‘But.’ Up to this he has done nothing, whereas Denis has begun, and may probably rise in his profession. He is clever.”

“Cyril is clever too.”

“You should transpose those two words,” says Miranda. After which there is a deadly silence.

“You mean something?” says Nora at last, leaning forward.

“A good deal,” plainly.

“What have you to say against him?” There is so much anguish in the careful carelessness of the young voice, that Miranda's courage—which is great—almost fails her; but with the emancipation of the girl in view, she goes on, though with reservations to which she had told herself she would *not* be restricted.

“I can say this—that he—is false—that he is now, this moment eng——”

Nora, rising swiftly, lays two soft hands upon her mouth.

“*Don't*,” says the poor child in a choked sort of way. “Don't. It is a lie—a lie—a *lie*! I *won't* believe it. He does love me. He does indeed, Miranda. Oh! I could tell you things—things that he has said. I am sure, in spite of everything, I am sure he loves me a great deal more than he loves her. Oh! a great deal! He doesn't love her at all. He—has *told me so*!”

CHAPTER XLIII.

" But the sleety blast blows chill
A gradh geal mo chroidhe
 Let me press thee closer still
A gradh geal mo chroidhe
 To this scathing bleeding heart
 Beloved as thou art
 For too soon—too soon we part
A gradh geal mo chroidhe."

MIRANDA feels something stir within her. Could she but know it, it is the desire to weep. If she ever *had* wept in her unloved life she would probably have given way to her inclinations now, but custom is everything, and tears hitherto have been unknown to Miranda's dull life. She remains silent, therefore, staring at Nora, with nothing but pity and unbounded compassion in her small, kind, brown eyes.

"He would tell you that, of course," says she. There is no smallest touch of unkindness or satire in her tone. "But I shouldn't listen to him if I were you. Come; Nora, be sensible! You must see that you can't marry a man without a halfpenny. A girl like you shouldn't make a fool of herself about any man. Not one of them is worth it."

"Yet you got married," says Nora resentfully.

"So I did, but then, you see, I had the requisite halfpenny. Oh! I'm not saying anything about my marriage. It was fair enough. If I had the money he had the title, and I was told myself I'd get the worth of my fortune when I married. A title has been my ambition all my life. Now I've got it. D'ye think if Anketell had been plain mister, I'd have had him? Not likely! I don't at all mind saying I'd have seen him far first."

The terrific plainness of this speech strikes Nora dumb. Miranda, serenely unconscious of having said anything out of the common, goes on serenely, in her steady, heavy, imperturbable fashion:

"I knew all about him," says she. "Took him in at the first glance. Saw he was as selfish as he could stick, and that he had all the attributes that go to make up a first

chop miser. I took care, however, he shouldn't play the miser on *me*. I had every penny of my fortune tied up—secured to myself—before ever I married him. I daresay he thought he could bully it out of me afterwards. But," Miranda pauses and smiles placidly, "I'm not good to bully," says she.

"You certainly had courage to marry any man, knowing all that of him," says Nora, shocked, with lowered eyes. She makes a desperate effort to suppress the horror she is feeling.

"I don't regret it," says Miranda cheerfully. "I can hold my own anywhere. So far I may safely flatter myself. I defy any man born to sit on me. I married Sir Fell for position, and I've got it, and," frankly, "I enjoy it. He knows all that. I made no bones of telling him so." Miranda is magnificently supplied with all sorts of commonplace expressions. She has, indeed, quite a storehouse of them. "But all this has nothing to do with you," says she. "I'm afraid, Nora, you are not of the stuff of which I am made. You are finer, my dear—finer. You will wear out sooner. You want love—you depend upon love for your happiness—and I'm afraid you won't find it where you most look for it!"

"I should rather be wretched with the man I loved, than—than live as you live," says Nora, with sudden violence. She is standing looking at Miranda, with wrath and rage and disgust in her beautiful eyes.

"Well, of course it looks like that to you," says Miranda placidly. "At least it looks like that *now*. And if one could keep the present with one always, I daresay it would look like that to the end of the chapter. But you ought to look ahead, my dear. You ought indeed. You think of Ferris as an ideal lover—but can he love *at all*? Is he not a little below the average in every way? Most men like their bread and butter—but I think Ferris is of the sort that will *have* it—no matter what it costs."

"You——" begins Nora, white as death now, but Miranda interrupts her.

"Oh! yes, I know—you want to abuse me, but what good will that do? I only want to do you good. And now, Nora, have you ever thought of how he goes on? Does he love you—or does he love that little snake, Mrs. Vancourt? He is a poor man, and an idle man, and Eldon

Vancourt can keep him in clover all his days. Over in Norfolk they say he is engaged to her. Of that I know nothing. But—a man like that—what does he know of love?”

“And you—*you*,” cries Nora, all her misery and despair merging into her outburst of anger, and swelling the torrent. “What do *you* know of love? You—who would marry a man just because he could make you Lady this or Lady that? Oh! the hatefulness of it! You,” clasp ing her little hands tightly, “you would *kill* love—you are an enemy to it—because it has never come your way! Well,” her words rushing like a little flame from her parted lips, “you who have married *without* love—are *you* happy?”

“Happy! Well, my dear, I hardly know,” says Miranda gently. “I don’t, indeed. As I have already told you, I don’t regret my marriage. That is a great deal to say.” She looks at Nora, and going to the girl, takes her unwilling hand, and holds it in her own two big, ugly ones. “You see it isn’t as if I hadn’t done some good by marrying Sir Fell. I’ve been a little help to you two girls, haven’t I now?”

Nora slowly lifts her eyes. Miranda’s wonderful patience has overcome her. The hand that Miranda holds now grows passive in her clasp—nay, it even returns the warm pressure that it feels.

“Well, you agree to that then,” says Miranda. “And now I want you to believe that I do nothing except with a desire for your good. Nothing at all! I’m homely I know—I’m——” poor Miranda cannot bring herself to call herself “vulgar,” “a little rough, perhaps, but I mean well to you and Sophie. I do really. And I——”

Here Miranda is brought to a full stop. Two warm, repentant arms are round her neck, a soft, repentant cheek is lying against hers.

“Oh, I was *horrid* to you,” whispers Nora. “Horrid! Horrid! I said, Miranda, that you had never known what love meant—that no one had ever loved you. That was untrue! Because, Miranda, I—I *love you*!”

CHAPTER XLIV.

"My heart it is cold, as the white winter's snow,
My brain is on fire, and my blood's in a glow."

THE shaded lamps in the drawing-room are shedding a little melancholy light all round. At least to-night it seems to be melancholy. All through dinner Nora had felt herself to be in extreme disgrace, and now, sitting on one of the lounges, with a magazine on her lap, ostensibly reading, she can still feel the angry eyes of Sir Fell fixed on her. He is standing on the hearthrug, under the mistaken impression, no doubt, that there is a fire behind him, brooding over his wrongs.

Miranda, at a little table, is pouring out tea. The good, rough creature is feeling sad. To let Nora, whom she loves, marry a worthless fellow like Ferris, seems so impossible a thing to her practical mind, that she has laid herself out to prevent it. This is in itself a worry, but that Sir Fell should torment, and scold and harass the poor child in between, is intolerable to her. There had been moments during the past dinner, when she could have pulverized Sir Fell with pleasure.

"Nora," says she abruptly now, with a view to taking notice of the disgraced Nora, and bringing her into the pale of friendship once more. "Give this cup to Sir Fell."

Nora rises nervously. Her book falls to the ground. She takes the cup from Miranda's kindly hand with down-cast lids, failing therefore to see the glance of encouragement directed at her, and carries the cup, with shaking hand, to Sir Fell.

Will he refuse to accept it from her? So frightened is poor Nora that, taking up a little gipsy stool she meets on her way, she carries it to the hearthrug, and laying it down at Sir Fell's feet, places the cup upon it.

"Your tea!" says she faintly.

Sir Fell frowns on her.

"Shall I—shall I put it on the chimney-piece?" asks she, hardly knowing how to conclude this painful interlude.

"No—do nothing!" says Sir Fell harshly. He takes an

angry step forward as he speaks. His toe catches in the gipsy stool, and away goes stool, exquisite Chelsea teacup, and all.

The cup is smashed to atoms.

"What the *devil* do you mean by putting a valuable cup on that three-legged stool?" exclaims he. "Was there no other place for it? 'Pon my soul, I believe you do it on purpose! Do you know what those cups are worth? Now that you've broken it, I hope you are going to replace it."

"Broke it! who broke it?" says Miranda, who has witnessed the transaction. "My good man, don't abuse Nora because you are sorry that *you* have mashed a Chelsea cup. That's unfair, if you like."

"My good man!" Sir Fell turns an annihilating glance upon his new wife. To be called "good man"—how hideously vulgar!

"No one has abused *you*," says Miranda. "Yet it was you who broke it; it was all your fault. If you had not been in such a bad temper all the evening, you would not probably have upset that stool, and your precious Chelsea cup might still be an object of reverence." She laughs most irreverently as she says this.

"Be silent, Miranda!" roars Sir Fell.

"Why should I be silent?" demands Miranda; who seems to swell in her chair, as she puts the question. To Nora's frightened eyes she appears at this moment the biggest woman in the world. She has dared to defy Sir Fell! "Who is there that shall compel the silence of any one? I acknowledge no superior when I feel myself in the right."

"I am in the right here—so far as *I* can see," says Sir Fell, with a weak attempt at maintaining his authority.

"Your sight seems limited," says Miranda. "Have another cup of tea? The last seems to have been imbibed by the carpet."

"Now, once for all——" begins Sir Fell furiously.

"You're always saying that," says Miranda. "I wonder you don't get tired of it. *I'm dead* tired of it. Let it be 'last for all' this time, like a good creature. You ought to know by this time, Anketell, that the high tragedy dodge doesn't go down with me. And, for one thing, I won't have Nora badgered."

"High tragedy dodge!" "Badgered!"

Sir Fell sinks back in his chair, and shudders visibly. Great Heavens! and he is *married* to this woman—and (supreme regret) without power to touch a penny of her money—without a chance of being able to make ducks and drakes of her fortune!

Miranda has noted the shudder—and for once takes umbrage.

"If you've got the ague," says she, "you'd better go to bed, and put on a mustard plaster. Mustard is good for the temper, and all other diseases."

"I shall certainly go to the library, where I must request that I shall be left in peace," says Sir Fell, rising, and marching to the door with much solemnity. As he opens it, a clock outside strikes nine.

* * * * *

It is a heavenly night. Through the mullioned window of the great staircase broad beams of moonlight pour—flooding the stone steps, and lighting up the handsome hall below.

Nora, with a light crimson cloak flung round her, but with her head bare, pauses on the staircase to comment on the beauty of it

"What a night," whispers she. "Like day; so clear, but how much lovelier! Look at the sky, Sophie—cloudless—serene—perfect!"

"Oh, do go on!" says Sophie, a trifle impatiently. "If you will go out to-night, to meet Cyril, let us get it over as quickly as possible. It is quite fifteen minutes since we left the drawing-room, and we *must* get back by ten."

"Yes—yes, of course!" says Nora. And then, with unconscious contradiction—"But why?"

"For one thing, because it will be late."

"How can it ever be late, when night is turned into day?" says Nora dreamily, looking through the staircase window to the brilliantly lit garden outside.

"Don't be an ass!" says Sophie, who is certainly a little—well, a *very* little—at times. "What has a good moonlight night to do with *les convenances*? You've got to be home, my good child, in three-quarters of an hour from this, or somebody is sure to want to know the reason why. So quick! march!"

At this moment a door on the corridor above is thrown open. A little, spasmodic shiver runs through the girls.

Can it be Sir Fell? Nora instinctively presses close to the wall behind her, in the mad hope that it will shelter her in its shadow; but the pale, silver search-light of the moon, she has been but just now applauding, reveals her slim figure to the eye of all. Ungrateful moon.

"You, Nora!" says Miranda advancing. The light from the lamp above shines on her broad features, as she advances. "You." She goes down the first two or three steps, then advances towards the shrinking girl, and presently laying a strong, firm hand upon her shoulder, draws her into the wider light. "And with that cloak," says she. "Where are you going?"

"I was going out," says Nora.

"And I was going too," says Sophie quickly, loyally. Miranda had of course seen Sophie, but she had grasped at once the fact that it was Nora who was going out, not Sophie.

"Yes," says she calmly, addressing Nora only. "I can see that. And for what?"

"To meet Cyril Ferris," says Nora suddenly—defiantly.

"Ah!" says Miranda. She draws in her breath. Then she says slowly, looking always, only at Nora—"You should not have done this, Nora—you might have trusted me!"

She takes the girl's hand in hers, and with a commanding glance at Sophie, who for once in her life is cowed—who is perhaps glad to be cowed—she moves as if to draw Nora up the stairs. Feeling the girl resist her, she stops.

"It is for a moment—a moment only," says she. "I want to say something to you. After that—you can go——"

Nora follows her.

She throws open the door of her room, and Nora enters it, Sophie following. Nora is openly rebellious; Sophie expectant. Sophie indeed is more than that—she is hopeful. "After all," she says to herself, "Miranda is *great*. Who knows what she may not be able to do? And there is one thing sure, that she likes Nora."

Meantime Miranda, having turned up the lamp, has turned to Nora.

"Now what *can* you expect to gain by such an escapade as this?" demands she bluntly.

"If I can't see him here, in this house, I have to see him elsewhere——" returns Nora, defiant always. Such a cruel

defiance ! A stand altogether incompatible with the sweetness, the natural gaiety of her nature. It makes Sophie's heart ache to see her ! To see the little, gentle, tender face trying to harden itself.

"Is that so necessary ?" asks Miranda ; and then, after a glance at the anguished face—" Well, I suppose so. But, good gracious, child, how badly life has dealt with you ! Why should such precious love as yours be given to one who can make so poor a return ? "

"You do not know," says Nora.

"Bah ! my dear. It is the commonest type of all. We all know him," says Miranda, coarsely, perhaps, but with divine intentions. "Now, come to the point, Nora. You love him—you say that he loves you. Well—why don't you marry each other ? "

"Oh, I don't think you ought to speak to her like that," says Sophie miserably.

"Like what ? Do you mean to say that people in society dare not ask the girl who belongs to them, who," gently, "is very dear to them, why she does not marry the man she loves ? "

"There may be reasons," goes on Sophie, who is now in an agony of sorrow for Nora.

"There is only one reason," says Nora coming forward. "He has very little money, and *I* have none, until—" She pauses. It seems terrible to have to confess that she cannot be her own mistress for quite five years to come.

"Until when ?" asks Miranda straightly. There is so much force in her air, that Nora answers her at once.

"Until I am twenty-five. It is a long time to wait, I know, but then I shall have five thousand pounds of my own, and that will be a little help to him. I *want* to help him," quickly, as though to disperse any unpleasant thought that might be in her hearer's mind.

"I can quite believe that," says Miranda slowly. "But there is one thing, Nora, that I think should be at once made plain to you. You think—Sophie thinks—all your friends perhaps have thought up to this—that on your twenty-fifth birthday, that five thousand pounds will become your own property."

"Well, well ?" It is Sophie who has said this, not Nora. Nora is silent, her face as pale as death.

"Well, that is all wrong ! Only this afternoon Sir Fell

told me the truth about it. Even at twenty-five—if you make a marriage of which Sir Fell disapproves—he can refuse to give you your fortunes.”

A dead silence.

“That *can't* be true!” says Nora at last in a dull, lifeless way.

“Only *too* true,” says Miranda. “Do you believe,” with perhaps the first touch of passionate vehemence she has ever known in her life, “that I don’t think the whole thing iniquitous? If so, you don’t know me. Justice above all things for Miranda Baxter! I call it right down low, the making of a will like that! But there’s no getting out of it, girls. I can tell you that.”

“He told you a falsehood,” says Nora again.

“No, my dear, no. I can read him like a book. It is the solemn, immoral truth. And as it stands, Nora—how about Cyril Ferris? How will it affect you and him?”

“I don’t see what difference it can make,” says Nora haughtily.

“No? Don’t you? I wish you wouldn’t take it like that,” says Miranda. “I wish you could see it in its true light.”

“Its true light?”

“Well, Sir Fell will certainly never give consent to your marriage with Ferris.”

“I don’t care,” says Nora stubbornly—miserably.

There is a slight pause. Then:

“But Ferris might,” says Miranda in a low tone.

“Ah! That is all you know about him,” says Nora, loyal to the last, though her very soul seems dying within her. That last dance. His open negligence of her, his allegiance to Eldon Vancourt—all, *all* return to her now. Yet she will not believe—she will not lower her idol in the dust, until—until indeed she sees him lying there, untouched by hand of hers.

“You say you know him,” says Miranda. “Will you tell him all that I have told you now? and ask him then if he will still hold to his—engagement with you?”

“Oh! Miranda!” says Sophie impulsively.

“Well, my dear! What?” demands Miranda, lifting stern eyes to Sophie’s. “I daresay I have not been brought up in a school like yours; but I bet mine was the purest. Call a spade a spade is *my* motto! And what I

say to Nora is—put her lover to the test. Tell him she must come to him without a penny if she comes to him at all, and then see what he will say.”

“Do you think I fear that test?” says Nora. “No. No. There is yet time, Sophie. Come—come with me. Already,” wrapping her cloak swiftly round her, “he will wonder why I am not there to meet him. Oh,” turning to Miranda, “you doubt him, you despise him—but he loves me. This—this turn of fortune that you have told me of, will not touch him or me at all. We knew we could not marry yet—not yet, when we were both so poor. But he has openings of many sorts—has he influential friends. He has told me of them—hasn’t he, Sophie? and really this paltry five thousand pounds of mine did not come into our calculations at all. Why”—throwing out her right hand in a little explanatory way—“it *could* not enter them, because he has often said we should be married next year or the year after, and that would be well within the five years that must elapse before I get my very small—*small* fortune! Do you see?”

“Yes. I see,” says Miranda with deep meaning. Meaning thrown away!

“Come. Come, Sophie!” says Nora presently, going towards the door.

“But now, Nora? Now, darling?—it is late, so *very* late.”

“Let her go,” says Miranda. “I shall go with her. You and I, Sophie, can surely so arrange as to stay near her, during her interview.”

“Yes. Yes. But hurry — *hurry*!” says Nora vehemently. She has gone to the door. “I shall be late, and I *must* see him now!” She passes out into the corridor.

Miranda throws a costly fur-lined cloak round her.

“Come then!” says she.

CHAPTER XLV.

" Too soon the blessed springs of love
To bitter fountains turn,
And deserts drink the stream that glows
From hope's exhaustless urn."

THE soft night sky is dotted with shining stars—every now and then there is a swift rushing of one across the heavens, that leaves for an instant a trail of delicate fire behind it.

The silence is almost deathlike; so strange, so perfect is it that the flowing of the river far away can be distinctly heard, and is felt to be a relief to the listening ear.

Nora, who has run down the brilliantly lit walk that leads to her trysting place (leaving Miranda and Sophie to wait for her upon a garden seat), pauses suddenly as if struck by this great quiet. It seems to her that it is only her heart—her heart alone—that is beating in all this strange silent world.

She stands, looking vaguely round her—a little white figure in her exquisite dinner-gown (Miranda may be almost said to have given each girl a trousseau), backed by a greenery, tall, soft, majestic, in this trembling light. Nervously her hands clasp each other—she looks heavenward—the perfect beauty of the perfect hour sinks into her—steeping her soul in the fragrance.

Yet how still—how still it all is. Her heart is beginning to beat with haste now—Oh! for some sound of life—! It comes!

A sudden sharp whirr through the air—a soft, sweet, wild cry. It is a bird—flying, flying—where? And at this hour? Who can tell? Its sad note strikes upon Nora's heart—a most desolate note, and yet with longing in it—a fierce longing.

" Oh! what wailing sadness
That no tongue may tell,
What enraptured gladness
In those wild notes dwell—
Bliss and anguish both—divine, ineffable."

Nora had been praying unconsciously for sound—for some break upon the strange silence that had seemed to

envelop her—yet now it has come, it frightens her. Like a little swallow she darts down the pathway, only pausing to take breath when she arrives upon the bridge.

There at the far corner is a figure—dark—unrecognizable beneath the shadows cast upon it by the clinging ivy that hangs upon the wall.

This figure, disengaging itself from the shadows, comes forward.

“Three-quarters of an hour late,” says Ferris. “A short time for a woman, no doubt.” The would-be pleasantry of his manner is drowned in the surliness of his tone.

“I couldn’t help it,” says Nora, running to him. “It is you, Cyril, is it not? Something kept me. Miranda of all people.”

“Lady Anketell? Does she know—suspect?”—asks he with a sudden vigour, that evidently arises from fear. He asks the question with the girl’s small loving hands in his.

“Well—she found out. I don’t know how—but she does know that you love me!” There is the sweetest belief in him, in these words. A belief that would have softened the heart of almost any man.

Ferris makes an impatient gesture.

“You have not explained yourself,” says he. “You say that Lady Anketell knows of—of our friendship. But there is something more surely—she objects to your meeting me then?”

“Yes. Oh, yes,” says Nora, drawing her breath quickly. “And now more than ever.”

“Now?”

“Now that Mr. Carnegie has told Sir Fell that he wants to marry me!”

“Carnegie!” for a moment a very madness of jealous rage attacks Ferris. Carnegie—rich—an heir to an Earldom!—Already he sees this small, sweet girl, with her lovely, loving eyes, now resting upon his, within Carnegie’s arms. And it is he—*he* himself who is thrusting her into them. Yet he has only to hold back now, to renounce Eldon Vancourt and all her works, and Carnegie will go wifeless for ever, so far as Nora is concerned! To hold back. That would be renunciation on his part—that would mean giving up all the fleshpots of Egypt for the mere delight of love! Love! that rarest—barest, thing!

"So that is what has kept you," says he coldly. "So they want to marry you to Carnegie! They have wisdom. No doubt they will inculcate you with it."

"You must not talk to me like that," says the girl earnestly, with a little touch of dignity. "Not even in jest! Mr. Carnegie, as you know, is nothing to me. There is no one in all the wide world who is anything to me, but you alone. You know that too, Cyril, don't you?"

"He has money," gloomily. He does not respond to her eager question, save in part. There is no eagerness in his reply. That first mad jealous wave has died away, and there is now left only cold calculation. In this small interim he has even had time to think that he may use Carnegie as a lever for the accomplishing of the purpose that has brought him here to-night—the breaking of a tender heart.

All at once he has decided! It is done. It is over. When he had promised Mrs. Vancourt last night to have finished finally with Nora, he had felt a sense of revolt, but he had worked down that sense all night, and now is prepared to offer up anything, the best, the dearest, the truest thing the world can afford, upon the altar of his own aggrandisement.

"Money!" there is a note of terror in the voice now—She remembers the test—the mission on which she has come. Miranda is waiting to hear the result of that test. "Money could not affect you and me," says she, her voice a little faint.

"Money rules the world," says he.

"But not you—not me!" says she again.

She stands back from him; her hands fall to her sides. Her eyes devour his face. *Such* eyes! she has grown suddenly, dreadfully white. She knows that now—*now* she must speak. She must tell him that if *ever* he marries her, it will be without Sir Fell's consent—and therefore without a penny.

She draws a quick breath. She throws up her head, as if indeed demanding more air. Had she dared to analyze her feelings at this moment, she would have known that distrust of this one being whom in all the world she loves best, is at the seat of her agitation. How will he take it—how?"

She is trembling. She moves a little to one side, and a brilliant gleam of moonlight, falling on her, shows her in all her beauty to Ferris. Perhaps never has she looked so lovely as at this moment, when despair is at her heart and hope lies dying.

"I seem to have many things to tell to-night," says she, her voice, low, tremulous, but clear. She tries to smile, but the effort is a failure. "Miranda told me—told Sophie and me—that—even when we *are* of age, according to my mother's will, we shall still have no right to our fortunes, unless Sir Fell approves of—of the people we marry."

There is a dead silence. Her large pathetic eyes are fixed on his. Will he never speak?

"It—it is dreadful for us—isn't it?" says she at last.

"A strange will!" returns he. He does not look at her as he makes this bald remark. Something strange has crept into the expression of his face. His eyes—shifty, uncertain—look anywhere, except at her.

"Well—but," says she rapidly, "it doesn't really matter so much, does it? It was so *little*. It need not matter—need it?"

"It is a will not to be disputed evidently. And—it need not be disputed either, that Sir Fell would not welcome me as a husband for you."

"No—No!" she is trying to keep calm.

"Sir Fell will not countenance me in that light," says the young man carefully. He has been very careful all through—"you acknowledge that."

"Yes." She has brought both her hands together; she is still telling herself that she must—she *will* be quiet.

"Ah! You begin to see it! I knew you would. That is your charm! You are so reasonable. It comes to this, Nora, that if I were to let you marry me, I should only think of myself ever afterwards as one who had done you an injury. I; No. No. We must not go into it! But you will understand that it is for *your* sake, Nora——"

"Don't!" She has thrown out her hands. She holds them out so, for some seconds, as though misery has frozen them to their tragical position. Then she lets them fall.

"Don't," says she. There is cruel passion in her voice! He has sounded for her, her death knell!

She had told herself, when Miranda put her to it, that it would be easy to tell him. Yet she had not found the

telling easy. That he should know at once seemed imperative. She had indeed rushed upon her fate. With her, having gone so far, it would be impossible to stop short—she *should*, she must go on, till all had been said. She is of those who, having once begun cannot rest until they have reached the end.

The end is now. After her one wild abandonment to the passion that is consuming her, she grows quite calm again; “*quiet*” as she calls it, and looks at him in a separated sort of way as if *he* were there, and *she* here! Her heart feels numbed, dead. She feels indeed even indifferent: so far indifferent that she is generous enough to help him a little out of his *cul-de-sac*.

“Money, as you say, rules the world,” says she in a singularly even—singularly dull tone. Even to Ferris this tone is a revelation. Where has the music of the old tone gone?

He feels no sorrow for that lost sweetness however. An ungenerous anger against her fills his breast. He had meant to play the hypocrite successfully in this little *scène de théâtre*—he had quite intended to pose as the injured, sorrowful, rejected lover! He had quite hoped to see the curtain come down with an audience (*à seul*) pitying him alone; but the girl’s wild, passionate, unconsciously insulting “*Don’t*” had scattered all those hopes. She understood him! she knew. He could not forgive her because she understood him too well—and knew him too well—always unconsciously—to her own sorrowing.

“As I say,” he repeats her words. “There is truth in them! Money *does* rule the world—I expect it will have to rule you and me.”

“That was not how you used to speak,” says she. “I—you remember——” she stops suddenly. “Ah! How I remember! As for you—do you ever remember anything?” asks she with quick tragical eyes, and an intonation that should have melted him. But he who desires gold, above love, is dead to all things!

“What am I to remember?”

“Nothing now. It was such a little thing, and you knew nothing of it, only what I once overheard you saying.”

“Well, what was it?”

“Oh! it is scarcely worth recalling now. It was about

love—that you thought love the best of all. You said money was nothing, or something like that. It was a long, long time ago, in the very beginning of this summer: You and Denis came into the orchard. And Sophie and I were up in an apple tree. And we were ashamed to come down, because—well it was I who was ashamed, my dress was so very shabby. And you and Denis stood beneath the apple tree and talked and talked—we thought you would never go away. Oh! how it all comes back—” with a curiously acute touch of anguish, “and it was then you said that love was *all* things to you. I don’t remember more—but what you said meant that! You said money was nothing. Nothing at all.”

“Ah! I remember,” says he. He pauses, and then goes on deliberately. “I called it dross, didn’t I? I,” with distinct brutality, “said that to please you!”

“You—you,” she stops as if choking. “You—said that—you—” she recoils from him. A terrible light is making her large eyes brilliant. “You *knew* that I was up there in that tree, all the time?”

“As well as you knew that I was beneath,” returns he.

“What do you mean?” says she slowly. “You can’t know what you are saying. I was there; true. And I saw you. But you would insinuate that I *deliberately* listened to you. That I stayed quiet on purpose to hear you. Oh! *that* is not true, *that* is not true,” cries she clasping her hands very gently, very tightly together. “I stayed,” with terribly simple pathos, “because of my frock. It was torn. I could not *bear* you to see it. Oh! that frock.” She raises her hands suddenly and presses them against her eyes. “If I had not thought so much of it—If—That frock has made the tragedy of my life,” says she. “It made me believe in you; often—often when I should have distrusted you, I thought of those words of yours, spoken on the day that frock was torn.”

She breaks out suddenly into a most miserable little laugh.

“One could make a little tract—a delectable little Sunday School story about it,” cries she. “One might point their moral with that vanity of mine. If I had not been ashamed to meet you in an old, old gown, I should not have had so much to go on—so much more to believe in. What a fool, what a *fool* I have been! And yet even

then I must have known. Was it my gown or was it me you loved?" She pauses. "Well—Mrs. Vancourt will always have pretty gowns," says she.

"You can of course insult me if you like," mutters he, very pale. This last stab has touched him. Eldon Vancourt's gowns could only be purchased by one who had money. Her money and her gowns seem inseparable. Has she only gowns and money!

"Insult—insult you!" cries Nora. "Could I insult you? And you? How have you insulted me? What have you accused me of? The basest of all things! You would make me such a one as yourself. *You!* who stood beneath that tree, and pretended to talk only for the benefit of your companion, of the sky, the earth, the air, anything, but for mine! Oh! the *cowardice* of it!"

He makes a movement as if stung!

"You cannot deny it; you said all that—only that I might hear?" cries she, now roused to such passionate despair and indignation, that she feels no pity for him. So open, indeed—so scornful is her condemnation of him, that anger rising in his breast gives him new strength.

"Well? why not?"

"You knew I was listening? yet you said it as though you believed me miles away?"

"All things are fair in love and war."

"Ah! Love!"

"You think I have behaved badly," exclaims he, furious because of the stabs of conscience that he still can feel—feel without heeding. "Yet what is to be said of one who deliberately listens to what she knows is not meant for her ears——"

"It *was* meant!" she interrupts. "Don't lose sight of that. Don't put that out of the argument—you yourself have said it."

"Ah! But so many days afterwards." He grows silent, and looks at her with a queer smile upon his lips. Perhaps he has never so desired her as at this moment when he is renouncing her, and flinging her deliberately out of his life. His very smile is fraught with passion . . . a most ignoble passion, yet of its kind, true.

"Yet—it *was* meant!" says she—she too pauses. "I could not get away, and tried not to listen. I have explained it! I shall never say another word! Ah!—there

will be no time in which to say another word." Once again she covers her eyes. But though she remains silent, and her little slight figure trembles beneath the intensity of her emotion, he knows that she is not crying; it has gone too deep for that—comfort is not for her—even so meagre a comfort as tears. The old, old pain of earth is tearing at her heart now. Where is there room for open lamentation?

" And in my hart also
Is graven with letters depe
A thousand sighs and mo :
A flood of tears to wepe."

Ay! to weep—but not now—not here—not until Time—kind, lovely Time—has killed the first wild pain!

"Nora!" he begins huskily.

"No; not another word! Not one!" She puts out her hands as if in protestation—letting him see that his surmise, about her eyes being dry, was a true one. They are dry, indeed, and bright, and burning. They seem to burn into his soul, maddening him with their accusations.

"You will remember this night for ever," cries he violently, "and *against* me!"

"For ever! For ever!" slowly.

"And that other day too. That one in the orchard?"

"Ah! yes. That, even more!"

"Yet you were in fault there as well as I was—as much. It was the same fault. I have thought of it often, and knew you saw me. And a woman who could deceive once could deceive again," says he, unfair—mean—poor—to the last.

"Well—I shall not deceive you again," says she, as if disdaining to go farther into it. She turns as if to go—then looks back at him; her lovely face and form are clear, distinct, to him, as she stands outlined against the dark greenery of the tall fir tree behind her. Her eyes are black as midnight, and as deep—her small face pale—her lips are parted; a little wave of her hair has tumbled across her white forehead, almost into those sombre eyes. "If I have deceived you," says she, "I am sorry!"

It is the deepest cut of all. And so softly spoken! Ferris is driven by it into forgetfulness of even his own interests. He makes a step towards her—he catches her hands. He tries to draw her to him—at this moment he

tells himself he is capable of thinking *all* things well lost for love!

"Nora! forget—forget! Let things be as they were with us. I shall give up everything—all—only forget——"

"But how?" She wrenches herself—delicately, even at this moment—from his grasp. "Oh! no!" she says. "There is nothing more between us to forget—or remember."

"There are some things to forget—*all* things to remember——"

"For how long? A month?" He would have caught her in his arms at this, but she uplifts her hand with so much majesty in it—so much disdain and misery and grief—that it renders her sacred, that he lets his arms fall to his side.

"No," says she. Slowly she turns. She is fading away from him for ever. He makes a last effort.

"One—*one* moment!" stammers he. She grants it, she looks back at him—she answers him!

"Don't deceive *her*! Be good to *her*!" says she.

She disappears amongst the trees. The shadows swallow her up. She is lost—lost to him for ever. And what had her last words meant? What did they contain? A blessing?

If so, they had failed in their purpose. Ferris strides back to Saggartmore slowly, heavily—as though a curse lies heavy at his heart.

CHAPTER XLVI.

"He is gone! He is gone!
And I wander alone,
By the stream where so oft
He hath called me 'his own,'
But his vows are forgot,
And my eyes are grown dim
With the tears I have wept
For the falsehood of him."

As she emerges out of the gloom, Sophie meets her alone. Sophie, who had been watching her approach, and who, seeing her, had told Miranda in an impassioned manner to go home—to go anywhere—at all events to efface herself for the present; whereupon Miranda—that good creature—had turned back to the house as swiftly as

her superfluous flesh would allow her, leaving the sisters to meet each other without a witness. Miranda had known consolation during her solitary walk back to the house. She knew that her cause was won. She was sorry and glad about Nora in a breath.

"It is you, darling?" says Sophie, going forward and looking at Nora. She would willingly have encircled her with her arms, but something in Nora's face forbids her.

"It is all over!" says Nora, calmly—quietly. "Miranda was right. He wants money. Money only. He will marry Mrs. Vancourt."

"Mrs. Vancourt?" Sophie's voice is almost lost in a stammer. She looks helplessly at her sister, quite broken with grief at the sight of that sister's face! Oh! the inconsistencies of the delightful human heart. Here Sophie, who for months has been longing to hear of Nora's final rupture with Ferris, now that the rupture is as complete as her heart can desire, is ready to faint with grief and regret.

Nora's pale, desperate little face—so dreadfully calm, so determinedly expressionless—creates such a pain in Sophie's honest breast, that now she declares to herself she would gladly hear that Nora's test had resulted in an even stronger tie between her and Ferris.

"There has been a little quarrel—a little misunderstanding—nothing more?" questions she, stammering worse now, and feeling more wretched than she ever was before in her life. "To-morrow it will be different. You and he——"

"There will be no to-morrow! It is all over—all at an end. I am nothing to Cyril any more—nor he to—I *hope* I shall not see him again! . . . Well—you are glad. But I——"

"Nora! *glad!* Oh! darling Noll, what a thing to say to me!"

"Not now—not now, but you will be glad to-morrow! How that to-morrow crops up! I wish—I mean—How tiresome that to-morrow is; it gives one a sense of fatigue. Always going on whether one wants it or not. I don't want it!" She is speaking almost petulantly, but apparently with no great feeling—only one who loved her and knew her—only Sophie, could read between the lines and see that she is broken-hearted. The brave true spirit

in that little fragile body would have upheld her before all the world, would have carried her, smiling, through the fire—the torture.

"I am *not* glad," cries poor Sophie miserably. "Oh! Nora—do you think I feel nothing—that I do not suffer with you? As if I would not give my life for you." She utters this little exaggeration with genuine intonation.

"Your life!" repeats Nora; she looks at her suddenly. Her pale haggard face grows infused with meaning. "Give me *help*," she says sharply.

"Help?"

"Yes. The best help of all. I must put an end to all this, and at once! You must arrange it," she lays her hand upon her sister's arm. "You said that Mr. Carnegie had spoken to you about me—that he loved me?"

"Oh, Nora! Not that! Are you mad, darling, to sacrifice your life like that? No, I shall have nothing to do with it."

"And yet you said you would give me your life?"

"Ah, but this is *your* life!"

"He has spoken to Sir Fell also. I know that," goes on Nora, taking no heed of her interruption, "he wants to marry me."

"Yes. Yes, darling. But don't think about that *now*." Sophie is sobbing. "Come in Nora." She tries to put her arms round her, but Nora repulses her.

"It is what I *must* think about. I shall marry him—now—at once. Oh," vehemently, "I wish I could marry him this moment. *That* would hurt him."

"Him? Mr. Carnegie?"

Nora bursts into low, but wild laughter.

"Oh, yes, it will hurt him too," says she, recklessly. "It will hurt us all. But I was thinking of Mr. Carnegie. Come—if you can't understand anything else, Sophie, do try to take into your head the fact that I wish to be married to *your* candidate—the family candidate." There is a mockery—a cruel carelessness in her tone that frightens Sophie, yet restores her to a keen sense of what is going on.

"If you have so arranged," says she, "I am glad for your own sake. He is good—he is true."

"I don't care what he is," says Nora recklessly. "If he were the incarnation of all the vices, and wanted to marry

me, I should say yes, to him now. You will go to Sir Fell to-morrow——”

“But Nora——”

“*Listen* to me,” she stamps her foot upon the ground, reducing Sophie to silence. “You will go to Sir Fell to-morrow morning, and tell him I have repented in sack-cloth and ashes about my refusal to marry your candidate,” with a bitter little laugh, “*this* morning. You will say, I shall marry him now, with pleasure. That,” laughing again, “I have seen the iniquity of my ways, and am willing to marry *any* man who is kind enough to want to marry me. What are you crying about?”

“About you,” says Sophie, mopping her eyes.

“About nothing then. You will end your days in Colney Hatch if you go on like that. Now you have heard—you know what to do.”

“Oh, Nolly! Don’t do that. Think, darling. *Do* think.”

“What folly you talk,” says Nora, smiling—coldly, absently. “What am I ever doing but thinking, thinking, thinking? You understand, Sophie? If Mr. Carnegie comes down to see Sir Fell to-morrow—as I know he will do—Sir Fell is to tell him that I am now ready to be his wife at any moment. The nearest moment the better.”

“But Nora, darling, if—if Cyril were to tell you that he still loved you——”

Nora catching her arms flings her from her. The beautiful, gentle, gracious face is transfigured.

“Will you drive me *mad*?” cries she.

She stumbles—sways forward a little——

* * * * *

“She is better now. She is all right. She still sleeps,” says Miranda, bending down to look more closely into Nora’s face.

The lids are closed, the long, dark dark lashes are lying on Nora’s snow-white cheeks—from the troubled bosom soft breathings rise and fall. A most merciful oblivion has at last caught and held her.

Miranda, who had loitered about the shrubberies, feeling a little nervous—a little uncertain, on her parting with Sophie—a little anxious too, to learn how matters had gone with Nora—had been startled from her musings in the laurel path by a quick cry.

It had brought her to Sophie at once—to find Sophie holding Nora's insensible form to her heart. Together, she and Sophie had carried Nora by a side-door to the poor child's room, and laid her on her bed.

She had been in a heavy faint, but now it was over and she is sleeping peacefully, the sleep of utter exhaustion. They are now congratulating themselves on the fact that *no* one had heard them bring in the poor little lovely thing from the shrubberies to the house.

"Yes. She is sleeping," says Sophie, who is looking nearly as white as the prone figure in the bed—"Oh, Miranda!"

"The test didn't wear?" asks Miranda with prophetic insight.

"He has given her up," says Sophie plainly, to whom the Delphic business is unknown.

"Hah! I guessed at him. And so my guess has come true?"

"Too true!"

"I was right then?"

"Yes!" Sophie pauses, and then bursts out, "I wish you had not been *so* right," cries she. "I wish you had been wrong."

"Why wrong? I thought you took my view of it?"

They have withdrawn into an ante-room.

"Oh, too *see* her!" cries Sophie, wringing her hands.

"I have seen her."

"But not then—not when she first left him. You—you would not have known her. Her little face all drawn and pale. Oh, my pretty girl! We should not have left her, Miranda, we should not indeed. We drove her to extremities—and him too."

"Don't bother about him at all events," says Miranda, drily.

"Yes, I know what you mean. I don't think him worthy—I don't care for him, but if we had not interfered—if we had not forced on that last interview between them, he might still have continued true to her. She is so sweet, so beautiful! I don't see how anyone could be false—or unkind to her."

"Don't you?" says Miranda, contemptuously. It is a kind contempt, however. "You don't know anything about men," says she. "How could you? *I've* studied

them, and, as far as I can judge, they are the poorest lot alive."

"Then you can't see *far*," says Sophie, whose thoughts have flown, for the first time for hours, from Nora. They have flown to Denis! Her tone is wrathful in the extreme. "I can tell you that——"

"Well, well, well!" interrupts Miranda broadly, "we need not fight on that score." She smiles, leaning forward and looming huge through the dim lamplight. "Of course I know Denis is a point of honour with you. But as a rule I say that men are worthless, faithless. They don't think long, and then think mostly for themselves."

"And women?"

"As a rule, too, they are faithless. There is not much to choose between them. It is human nature. There, don't fight me again. I am not talking of you or of Nora, only I will say, that if men get over their love affairs in double-quick time—girls get over theirs—in time too."

"How do you know that?" asks Sophie, who is feeling a sense of indignation. "Have *you* got over yours?"

"Me? Law, *no*!" says Miranda, who looks inclined to laugh. "The fact is, Sophie, I was never in love in my life with anyone, and certainly no one wasever in love with me."

"You don't look like that," says Sophie suddenly, seeing all at once, as if in a revelation, the tenderness, the capacity for loving that lies in the big, broad, heavy, kindly face before her. "You look as if you could love—something!"

"You're right there," says Miranda. "I could, but I can't! I could have loved a child—my *own* child. That has always seemed to me the only love worth a woman's having; well, I shan't know that love, I suppose!" She sighs—but immediately afterwards draws Sophie to her and kisses her. "Meantime, I have you two girls," says she. "And I love you—I do indeed. I am going to do all I can for you!"

"Oh! Miranda! I wish you could do something for Nolly."

"Time. Time will do that! And Time is working now. Believe me," says Miranda, "that the best day she ever saw is this day on which she has got rid of Ferris!"

"I think that too," says Sophie nervously. "It seems heartless to say it when she is so unhappy, but it is true."

"Just one wrench, and then she will know liberty again. And I will help her," says Miranda. "You may trust me. You *are* my children, you know. I have adopted you."

"Until you have some of your own," says Sophie, smiling kindly, if a little sadly.

"Ah! no, no!" Miranda stops short, and pushes back her hair. "One has money, but one has not happiness," says she. "Sometimes, do you know, Sophie, I envy the peasant women when I see them with their little, half-naked babies tumbling about their feet. All my thousands cannot give me the bliss that they must feel."

CHAPTER XLVII.

"But why arose a morrow,
Annie dear?
Upon that night of sorrow,
Annie dear?"

"You are better, darling?" asks Sophie, stopping short on her tiptoed advance into Nora's bedroom, as she sees Nora's eyes wide open, looking at her.

"I am quite well," says Nora. There is a certain hardness in her tone.

"But still, lie quiet—lie quiet," says Sophie entreatingly. She has stolen in on tiptoe (as has been said) with a huge lump of coal wrapped up in a newspaper in her hands, fearful lest if a servant entered, she might rouse Nora from her sleep. It is very early still—barely seven o'clock, and Sophie, who had been in and out of her sister's room all night, had feared that the fire was growing low. Miranda had said that Nora should be kept warm, and now that the autumn is upon us, it has seemed wise to light a fire in her room.

"Oh! quiet, quiet," says Nora impatiently. "What have you got there?"

"A lump of coal!"

"Coal?" fretfully. "If that fire doesn't go out soon, I shall die. I am burning. *Feel* me," holding out a most perfect little hand, hot with fever. "To die! would that be so bad?" She laughs.

"Very bad indeed!" says Sophie severely, planting the

lump of coal upon the fire with a thud. "I can't bear you when you talk like that, Nora," turning an indignant, loving face to the bed. "It is so selfish! If you were to die, what would become of me, do you think?"

"You would marry Denis," says Nora. "*He* would pull you through!" Her eyes gleam with a curious brilliancy in the white oval of her face. They seem the only part of her alive. Her pallor is so extreme as to suggest the old, yet ever new thought, of death. "Sophie, come here."

"No, you must not talk," says Sophie. "Miranda says you must be kept very quiet. Now do lie still, Nolly, *heart*, and try to get rest and strength. I have ordered an early breakfast for you, or rather Miranda did, and it will be here in a moment."

"I hate that old dressing-gown you are wearing," says Nora suddenly. "*What* a colour! Do you remember, Sophie, how I always said lavender meant misery? Burn that thing! It is I, however, who should have worn it! You—you will not be miserable."

There is a thrill of despair in the soft young voice that goes to Sophie's heart.

"Oh, Nolly, *talk* to me," cries she, flinging herself on her knees beside the bed. "Can't you tell me about it? I know what you feel, that you must bury it up some way, but if you didn't—if you said something——"

"Well, I can't," says Nora, slowly, icily. "I *can't* talk. I've got to do it alone. Don't add to my burden, Sophie—don't be unhappy about me. I am all right really, only wretched. Many people are wretched. Don't look upon me as a singular case—a fresh discovery. Get up, Sophie. I want to arrange things with you."

Sophie rises to her feet.

"What things?"

"About Mr. Carnegie for one." She too rises now, and sitting up in her bed, propped by the pillows that Sophie presses behind her back, looks at her sister out of bright eyes sunk in white, hollow cheeks. "You say he loves me?"

"Yes, it is true," says Sophie faintly, her eyes on the ground. She, who would have been Carnegie's staunchest champion a week ago, nay, a night ago, is now unable to utter a syllable in his favour.

"And that he wants to marry me?"

"Yes," says Sophie again, in the same sepulchral tone.

"Then you will be the one to tell him that I shall marry him as soon as ever he likes."

"No—I shall not tell him that. I shan't indeed, Nora, and once for all, I *won't*," says Sophie. "Just consider! you ask me to compel you to marry a man you don't even care for. It is cruel of you, and I shan't do it."

"You must," says Nora.

"Why marry at all?"

"Ah!" Nora's teeth come down upon her lips. "If you won't tell him, Sir Fell will," says she; "and, at all events, you can tell Sir Fell about my decision. Mr. Carnegie is coming here to-day, I know you must give a hint to Sir Fell beforehand. Why what is the matter with you?" frowning angrily at Sophie. "Only yesterday you were angry with me because I *would* not marry this wonderfully good match you have all arranged for me, and now when I want to marry him——"

"Ah! That is just it. *Do* you want to marry him? You know you do not! And is it not unkind to him? If he does still love you——"

A sharp exclamation from Nora stops the continuance of Sophie's speech.

"If," says she, in a low tone. "*If*!" She starts up, as though some awful fear has just occurred to her. "Oh! if he should have changed his mind; if he should not now wish to marry me! Sophie, Sophie, what should I do *then*?"

"Nora, do lie down. Do! Think of yourself."

"Oh, I must, I *will* get engaged to somebody. I don't want to marry anyone, Sophie, you understand"—her eyes gleaming with fever. "But I will not be left forsaken. I—I——" She falls back on her pillows exhausted. "I can marry Peter Kinsella at all events," says she, with a laugh that is like a moan!

It is a laugh that frightens Sophie.

"You shall marry whom you choose," says she. "Anyone! I'll see to it. I'll do anything you wish. Tell me what you want!"

Nora's laughter has died as quickly as it began.

"Ah! what *I* want," says she.

She is silent for a long time after this—for so long a time, indeed, that Sophie, watching her closed lids, is on the point of ringing for Miranda. Then suddenly she goes

on again. "I shall never want anything again. I have no wants, no wishes, no desires, they are all dead." She rouses herself suddenly as though memory has quickened in her troubled brain. "Save one," she cries. "I have told you—you know it."

"It is not an honest one," says Sophie mournfully; "but I will help you in it. I shall tell Sir Fell your decision, and he will tell—Mr. Carnegie."

"Yes, yes, yes," feverishly. "But—a moment since you cast a doubt upon the idea that Mr. Carnegie still desires to marry me."

"You did. I didn't. Nonsense!" says Sophie, with spirit. "As if one couldn't *see* that he would propose to you every day for a *year*, if he thought there was a chance of your accepting him on the three hundred and sixty-fifth."

Now, though Nora had been so plainly terrified at the thought that Carnegie might not prove a constant lover, this speech of Sophie's makes her shrink as though hurt by some harmful thing.

"Oh! how I *hate* him," says she. And then almost immediately, "I shall get up."

"Not yet, Nora, darling. Don't be foolish now. Why here comes your breakfast," as the door opens and a very tempting little tray is brought in by a trim maid. "Here, Bridget, put it here—close to Miss Nora. She will stay in bed for an hour or so longer—until," smiling at the maid, "the sun grows warmer."

"A good thing too, Miss," says Bridget, busying herself with a little table and the tray, and finally with the pillows behind Nora's back. "An' are ye betther now, Miss Nora? We heard from Miss Sophie as ye were bad enough last night wid yer head, an' sure thim throublesome bilious attacks is a worry to most."

"Ever so much better, Biddy," says Nora, smiling at her.

"Faix, that'll be good news for the lot of us," says Bridget, tucking her up anew before departing.

"I shall get up for all that," says Nora, springing out of bed the moment the door closes behind the faithful Bridget. "I can't lie still, Sophie—I can't indeed. Take away that tray. Do you think I could eat? And, Sophie, go to Sir Fell—go at once—and tell him what I have said. Go *at once*. I want it all to be finished—finished. I want to kill hope even; the hope that has killed *me*!"

CHAPTER XLVIII.

"Thy own bright arbutus hath many a cluster
Of white, flaxen blossoms, like lilies in air.
But O ! thy pale cheek hath a delicate lustre
No blossoms can rival, no lily doth wear."

"SHE's perfectly prostrate, poor little thing," says Miranda. She is sitting in the library opposite to Sir Fell, who, standing on the hearthrug, with the tails of his coat between his arms, is listening to her with a sour countenance. There is, however, beneath the customary sourness a certain sense of triumph, of satisfaction.

"Pshaw !" says he. "Prostrate ! When one hears a woman is prostrate, one is to understand that she is in her bedroom, drinking strong tea, eating buttered cakes and generally enjoying herself."

"Nora is not enjoying herself," says Miranda. "She's very low—very low indeed. You needn't make yourself more unpleasant than you can help about her."

"I am not aware that I am seeking to make myself unpleasant," says Sir Fell pompously. "But I confess that hypocrisy has never had any charms for me."

"Who's the hypocrite here ?" asks Miranda.

"Scarcely necessary to ask, I should say. It seems to me Nora knows pretty well where her interests lie. She has very wisely thrown over that impecunious young man Ferris, and has decided on marrying Carnegie, who is so excellent a *parti*, and who will give her position. I opened her eyes to that yesterday. I spoke very carefully to her. She evidently saw the folly of her ways in having anything to do with Ferris, when such a splendid offer lay ready for her acceptance. All this is well, I say. But that she should pretend grief and despair about it—that I acknowledge is, to me, the very rankest hypocrisy."

"You don't understand Nora !" says Miranda. "She's beyond you. I tell you she has given up Ferris only because he has given up *her*—and she is breaking her heart over his loss !"

"Tut ! She takes you in," says Sir Fell, with a contemptuous air. "Permit me to say it is *you* who are in the

dark about her. An astuter person I never met than Nora. And a most excellent actress into the bargain. All the time I was talking to her yesterday, she pretended to abhor the notion of marrying Carnegie; yet here to-day you bring me word, that she is willing and ready to be his wife on the very shortest notice! You should exert your brain, Miranda. It wants working. You are too easily taken in by that girl."

"Oh! don't be a fool!" says Miranda.

"A what? A *what?*" demands Sir Fell, rising in his wrath. "Do you know, Miranda, to whom you are speaking?"

"I could make a good round guess," says Miranda. "There! keep your hair on!"

Sir Fell falls back into the nearest chair. He is evidently quite overcome.

"My hair!" gasps he. "What a woman!"

"Ha! ha!" Miranda breaks into one of her loud astounding laughs, that, as a rule, shake the house. "I've heard of the ejaculation, 'My hat,' but never 'My hair' before!"

"I don't follow you; I," stiffly, "*seldom* follow you."

"So much the better for me," says she, still laughing loudly. "I hate you to dog my footsteps oftener than you do. There," with a fearful geniality, and a slap on his shoulder that throws him into the nearest chair, "I knew that would put your back up. "But——"

"My back?" says he.

"Oh! Don't go in for any more ejaculations," says Miranda. "There isn't time. What we have to consider now is Nora. You tell me Mr. Carnegie is coming here to-day about four o'clock. For what?"

"I don't know, indeed. Probably to talk over his proposal to this cunning little person in whom you persist in believing."

"Well. You can tell him she is willing to accept him. I shouldn't put it more cheerfully than that if I were you—as she is in a terrible state. Not violent, you know—but silent—white—the picture of despair!"

"For Heaven's sake!" says Sir Fell, rising once more to his feet, "let us be done with all that. The girl is glad, *thankful* to accept him. You must be mad to think otherwise."

"And you must be a fool to think as you do," cries Miranda—for once losing her admirable temper. "And I tell you this—you will ruin the whole affair if you don't conduct it properly. The slightest chance and she will turn restive again. I want her to marry Carnegie, who, I firmly believe, will do her justice, and make her happy. *You* want to get her off your hands as cheaply as possible."

"Cheaply—cheaply—what has cheapness got to do with it?" asks Sir Fell with dignity.

"Well—he refuses her fortune for one thing!" says Miranda drily. "There! Don't think *you* can hoodwink me—though you believe that poor child can. I know all about it. I——"

"All about what?" Sir Fell raises his hands to his head as if bewildered. "You puzzle—you upset me. I hardly know sometimes, whether," plaintively, "I am standing on my head or my heels."

"Better take a looking glass about with you then!" says Miranda, flouncing towards the door. "One thing I warn you of," looking back at him from the threshold, "Be gentle with that girl,—or—I'll settle with you later on."

* * * * *

Nora, now that she has entered the room, stands quite still near the door. Someone had closed it behind her. She never knew who. A film, a vague grey cloud, has spread itself before her eyes. It clears away in a moment or two; moments that to her seem hours, and with a little, eager desire to get at something that will support her—something to which she may cling, she goes quickly to the central table, and lays her hand on it. Her very soul seems sick within her. She is conscious that Sir Fell has been saying something—to *her*, presumably—but what, her deaf ears have not heard. Oh! to be dead!—to be dead! that is the one sad refrain that repeats itself in her brain. It had been repeating itself all last night.

Suddenly Sir Fell's voice comes clearly to her ears, sounding from a distance as it were, but with hateful distinctness.

"I beg, Nora, that you will collect yourself, and show some courtesy to Mr. Carnegie."

"Miss Carew is tired — that late dance has still its wearying effects," says Carnegie.

His voice sounds quite close to her ear, and Nora, with

a little start, finds he is beside her—and instinct tells her, he has been beside her for some time, during which her dulled intellect had not perceived him.

"Even if fatigued—one can be polite," says Sir Fell, more pompously than ever. "And especially on an occasion such as this. You have already been told, Nora, I have no doubt—but permit me to remind you that Mr. Carnegie has come here to-day to do you the honour—the *honour*," emphasized, "of asking your hand in——"

"Go!" says Carnegie, turning to him quickly, with a most amazing rudeness. "Leave us. I should like to speak to Miss Carew alone!"

He steps backwards, opens the door, and, with a gesture that is almost imperious, gives Sir Fell to know that he is to pass through it.

Sir Fell obeys.

Carnegie, having closed the door behind him, goes back to Nora.

"He has an unfortunate manner," says he gently, but with a suspicion of agitation. "Do not let it prejudice you against me."

He waits as if listening for something from her, but as nothing comes he goes on again, her white, lowered face inspiring him.

"You mean it?"

"Yes."

"Nora! Is that true?" He suppresses, by a violent effort, the burst of passion that longs for utterance. "Is it true that you wish to marry me?"

"It is true."

"But—but that does not coincide with what you said to me at the ball at Saggart—You remember what you said then?"

"I remember." Her fingers tighten on the table. She has not once raised her eyes to his.

"Then you refused me!" He hesitates, but she does not move, she does not raise her eyes. "Then," continues he, "you told me to go to Sir Fell, and exp'ain to him that I—could not marry you. I came to-day to do your bidding, and—I learn that you have changed your mind, and that you are now willing to accept me."

He hesitates again—and again no answer comes from her. Only she grows whiter—whiter.

"*Have* you changed your mind?"

He waits with extraordinary patience—but beyond a sudden, swift movement—as if to go to the door—as if to escape—a movement, however, overcome—no return to his question comes to him.

"Nora! Answer me!" says he sharply — and with authority—"Do you wish to marry me?"

"Yes—yes!" says the poor child, timidly—"I told him. I sent him word. He—must have told you."

"And is that all?" says Carnegie. "Am I to be told by him only? Have you no word to give me from yourself alone? Nora! Only that you are the one woman in the world for me—only that I believe you are so young, so heart-whole that I may by the very force of my own love for you induce you to give me your love in return—I should now draw back from a compact that——"

"Don't draw back," says she. Suddenly, all at once, she has found her voice. She is looking at him, with a strange, anxious fire in her lovely eyes. "I want you—*don't* draw back."

"You *want* me?" He comes nearer to her—but she waves him from her.

"Stay there," says she, quickly—vehemently. "I must explain to you. I like you. I do indeed. I like you very, very much. But——"

"Well—go on," says he gravely. "You like me very much, and I *love* you! The case stands thus. But, as you only like me, why do you want to marry me?"

"Well—Because I like you, and because—Oh, no—no——" She stops suddenly, and bursts into tears! "You ask—you ask——" sobs she.

"Too much! Don't cry, Nora! Don't—*Don't* cry!" He takes one of her hands from her face—holds it a moment to his lips, and then, suddenly, impulsively, he encircles her with his arms.

With a perfect passion of anger, she shakes herself free, and stands back from him; her eyes blazing, her whole soul in revolt.

"Don't *touch* me!" says she violently.

"As you will," says Carnegie, now nearly as white as she is. "May I not speak to you either? May I not tell you that I love you?"

"Oh, love!" says she. "Love! *Is* there such a

thing?" She recovers herself by a strong effort, and compels herself to go on. "Another day—another day you shall tell me of it," says she faintly. "I know nothing of it. Nothing!"

* * * * *

There is a long pause.

"Are you sure of that, Nora?" says he, presently. "Are you sure that you——" He hesitates, and changes his sentence, "that no one has ever loved you before?"

"Quite—quite sure! In all the world." She stands up, and looks at him with bright, wild eyes. "In all the world there was never anyone so unbeloved as I am."

"Nora! am I nothing?" says he, his voice trembling. He takes a step towards her.

"Nothing—Nothing!" cries she fiercely. She falters, her arms drop to her sides, she makes a curious attempt to cross the room, and fails.

Carnegie has barely time to catch her in his arms, as she falls forward, insensible!

CHAPTER XLIX.

"How hard is my fortune,
And vain my repining;
The strong rope of Fate
For this young neck is twining."

"I'm quite well now, Sophie. I am, indeed." Nora raises herself from the sofa on which she has been lying, and gets slowly to her feet.

"Oh, but don't stir. Lie there quietly. Do, now, Nora, dearest heart, you can't think how pale you look still."

"It is only that my head aches!" says Nora, pressing her hand against her forehead. She smiles, suppressing the sigh that is forcing itself to her lips. Her poor heart! How *it* aches!

"That is the very thing! You should not stir. You——" Sophie pulls up the cushions fussily, and makes little dabs at them with her hands, and pats and presses them into a beautiful shape, full of comfort. "You should just rest here all the evening, if you won't go to bed."

"To go to bed now," says Nora. She glances through the open window into the sweetness of the growing dusk.

Evening is only beginning to encroach upon the day, yet already sweet shadows, filled with dewy dreams, are lying about in the garden. "Oh, no! Bed means misery. I should not sleep; and when," wearily, "one does not sleep, one thinks."

"Poor ducky!" says Sophie.

It is the homeliest, perhaps the silliest of all homely expressions, but as Sophie utters it, it is love itself. It is so sweetly kind in this instance that Nora's wounded, breaking heart expands beneath it.

"Sophie," says she, "tell me! When you came in, how did I look?"

One can see that it almost hurts her to ask this question, so vivid is the blush that dyes her face from brow to chin.

"Perfectly all right!" says Sophie. "You were lying back in the armchair, and positively, for a moment, I couldn't see that there was anything the matter with you. You looked so natural; so like yourself."

"Ah!" says Nora. She draws a sigh of honest relief.

"It was so foolish of me—but I suppose I was a little overdone. And I was frightened. And——"

"Yes, I know," says the good Sophie. "It takes a lot out of one, to be really unhappy."

"Yes, yes. But I *do* feel ashamed. To faint—and for nothing! He must think me an idiot."

"He thinks you perfection. You should have seen his face when he called me. I was just passing through the hall as he opened the library door; what luck *that* was! It might have been one of the servants or Sir Fell. But, providentially, it was me. He looked like a ghost. He quite *hurt* my arm as he caught me and drew me into the room. And after all it was nothing; you opened your eyes almost as I got to the chair in which you were."

"It was so unpleasant," says Nora, frowning. "I have always so hated a scene. And now I have made myself the heroine of one."

"He said something, Nora, just before you quite recovered yourself. I think, perhaps, I ought to tell you. If you are going to marry him, you——"

"What did he say?" Nora looks at her enquiringly, yet without anxiety.

"He said: He was nervous—upset—or probably he would never have said it—and I don't think perhaps,

after all, that I ought to repeat it. And I shouldn't, Nora, only that I think, if you *are* going to marry him, you ought to undo the impression."

"But what impression? What is it? What did he say?"

"He said: 'Sophie, she hates me!' There was something *dreadful* in the way he said it. As if the words broke his heart as he said them. Nora, you don't hate him, do you?"

"I neither hate nor love him. I," she breaks away from her enforced calm, and says passionately: "I neither hate nor love anyone—anything."

"Oh! that's not true," says Sophie, cheerfully. "You love me, certainly. *That's* all nonsense. I know you are unhappy, Nora—as unhappy as ever you can be, but—other people can be unhappy too."

"Other people!" Nora stares at her. "You?"

"Yes. Why not? You remember what Miranda said last night, that Sir Fell could refuse to give us our money unless we married to please *him*. Well, Denis will not please him! I don't see now," sighing, "how I am *ever* to marry Denis! You think yourself unhappy, Nora, and you are—you are indeed," with deep sympathy. "But then I am unhappy too."

"You!" says Nora again. She rises to her feet, and looks at her sister strangely. "You can never be unhappy," says she. "He loves you. But I—but I——"

She throws her arms out from her suddenly. Sophie goes to her.

"If you are so unhappy about this engagement with Mr. Carnegie, why don't you throw it up?" says she hurriedly.

"That is the worst of it. There is no going back. One never can go back, Sophie. A thing once done is done for ever. We walk on through life, and, as we go, the road closes up behind us. If—" drawing back, as though some horrible thought had struck her, and laying her hand upon the arm of the sofa to steady herself—"If we seek to turn—to retrace our footsteps—we find a wall behind us, tall, unsurmountable, unconquerable."

"In your case there is surely a going back," says Sophie.

"There is *no* going back, I tell you. We may mend our ways on the journey, we may say that we stumble less, that

we avoid the stones—the pitfalls, but—we can *never* go back ! ”

“ You *can* go back, Nora ! ”

“ Can I ? Just think ! I can throw over Mr. Carnegie, no doubt, to marry some other man. But shall I love that other man more than Mr. Carnegie ? Can I ever love again ? How *am* I to go back ? ”

“ You would then ? ” asks Sophie.

“ Oh ! if I could ! ” She turns away from Sophie, and walks to the window, with hurried steps and a soul on fire. If she could ! If she could wake once again with a light, glad heart—with no knowledge of that terrible thing called love.

Her last interview with Ferris had torn her heart in twain. She had loved—and the one she loved had been laid bare before her—his soul had been uncovered in her sight—all his deformities stood out hideous, cancerous. He had lied, deceived ! He had no honour ! Honour ! that greatest of all things, was unknown to him. The girl had seen this, and the knowledge had withered her. And yet—and yet—the tones of his voice ring still in her ears. She can see the soft glances—the tender looks, that once were all hers.

“ But, Nora, there is plenty of time. Get out of this engagement. *Do*, darling ! I can see how wretched it is making you. Get out of it some way or other. ”

“ But how ? ”

“ Oh ! I don't know ; *wriggle* out of it. ”

“ Let me speak the truth for once, Sophie,” says Nora. She is standing, looking in the growing dusk like a slim lily, so pale, so cold, so upright. “ I shall marry Mr. Carnegie because—because I have to marry somebody. Because,” slowly, with a cruel effort, “ I don't want Cyril to think I am—forsaken. ”

“ Nora ! ” Sophie runs to her. “ How dare you say such a thing ? You, *you* forsaken ! Well, I should think he will see now that you are not that. Why, Mr. Carnegie is quite a splendid match—much better than *him*. He,” slowly, and with most unmistakable malevolence “ He will be eaten alive with jealousy when he hears of this engagement. ”

“ I should like him to hear, and at once—*quickly*, ” says Nora, her breath coming in little short sighs from her.

"Should you? Well, I'll arrange that. Eusebius will manage it. But *do* lie down and rest yourself, darling. You are looking like a ghost again."

"I should like to go into the garden, I think," says Nora. "How sweet it looks. How calm. And the air—I want the air upon my forehead."

"Come then," says Sophie. "A little stroll up and down will do you no harm. It is only six o'clock, and they will not expect to see me in the drawing-room until a quarter to eight."

* * * * *

Outside all is soft, filmy, beautiful. A little veil lies over everything—a veil soft as gossamer, and almost as warm, though this veil is of mist.

The two girls, pacing soberly along the accustomed walks, silent, sad, scarce heed the beauty of the coming night. Heed scarcely anything, indeed, until a head showing itself over the broken part of the wall from the right-hand side, catches Sophie's eyes. Perhaps she had been looking out for it.

It is the head of Denis Butler. Sophie, dropping a little behind Nora, under the pretext of picking an imaginary flower, waves to him frantically to go away. To go away *at once*. To her kindly heart it seems that now it would be a most cruel thing to bring into evidence the man who loves her, when the one whom Nora loves has just proved so basely false.

Denis, with his knee on the top of the wall, in the act of descending, gazes back at Sophie, as if not understanding. He has come a long way, and to be sent about his business like this, does not occur to him as altogether a correct sort of thing. Seeing him hesitate, Sophie makes a last, great demonstration, with both her arms this time, and the words "Go away," framed upon her lips, come almost to an utterance.

Nora catches the demonstration, just in time to see Mr. Butler about to go as he had come. *She* waves to him in turn, and seeing him arrested in his flight, turns to Sophie.

"It is no good, Sophie," says she mournfully. "I'll have to dree my weird, one way or the other. Go to him. Go to Denis. He must learn it to-day, if not to-morrow. Better to-day."

CHAPTER L.

"The sun on Ivera
No longer shines brightly ;
The voice of her music
No longer is sprightly."

NORA, left to herself, goes slowly down the scented paths of the old garden. Past the bushes of flaming fuchsia, and the round staring beds of asters, to where the lavender grows in wild confusion, and the late-sown mignonette is giving an added sweetness to the evening air.

Heart sickness is making her its prey. So sick she is, that she cannot lift her head, or care for anything, or see the beauty that is calling to her all around. Some people in their grief have strength to rise and defy their fate, but Nora—a little girl—country bred, and knowing nothing of the great compelling that would rouse a girl born to society and the world to smile and talk, and show interest in things in her own set, though her heart were bursting—breaks down entirely. Though, to do her justice, it is in private she breaks down ; and perhaps, her blood being good, had she been flung into the world at this moment, in spite of her country life she could have shown herself as calm, as sphinx like, as the best society girl of the season.

But here—here in this sweet, cool garden, with no one to pry upon her sadness, she gives her grief full sway. Not in open tears indeed—she seldom cries—but in the terrible heart tears, that destroy the young.

It has been a relief to her to get rid of Sophie. Of even *Sophie* ! She had betrayed her grief to Sophie. It was impossible not to do so. Sophie was always present, so much *there*, always on the spot. Darling Sophie ! But she had often wished that *no* one in the whole wide world should guess at the trouble of her heart.

She would have kept it away from every one, a sacred sorrow known to herself alone, but like the sad person in that exquisite poem of Robert Bridges, who says :

"How may a man in smart
Find matter to rejoice ?
How may a moorning hart
Set forth a pleasant voice ?

Play whoso can, that part ;
 Nedes must in me appere
 How fortune ouerthwart
 Doth cause my moorning chere."

Nora's sad thoughts are suddenly broken in upon. She had turned a corner in her lonely, sad meditations, and the voice of Daddledy, uplifted, strikes in upon them.

He is bending over a rose bush, and is evidently counting the flowers upon it.

"Eight, nine, tin. Fegs, 'tis tin! Oh! Wirra!" At this point he sees Nora, and his voice grows piercing.

"Who's been pickin' me roses?" demands he, standing before the rose bush, that certainly looks shorn. "Was it you or Miss Sophie? Fegs, I wouldn't put it beyond either of ye! Come now, spake the truth."

"It was Sir Fell," says Nora, in a dull sort of way. Another time she would have resented this accusation, and the manner of making it. "I saw him bring in some of them in the afternoon—to the library."

("To adorn the room for the sacrifice,") she tells herself bitterly. To make it beautiful for Mr. Carnegie when he came. To brighten up the old house, to show it at its best, so as to enhance the value of the victim. Yet, is she a victim? Is she not rather a very willing sacrifice?

"The masther?" asks Daddledy, wrath growing in his eyes.

"Yes," indifferently, "Sir Fell."

"May the divil fly away wid him," says Daddledy, whose manners are not his strong point. He gives vent to this appalling wish with a purple face, and a great deal of emphasis.

"Why?" asks Nora, stopping short on her way up the pretty path to ask him the question. "They are his own, are they not?" She is so mad with all the world, the world that has placed *her* in the wrong—that to put even so small a creature as this old man in the wrong seems to her at this edged moment a necessity.

"*His*, is it?" Daddledy stops as if choked with wrath, and the choking having given him pause, he goes on again more quietly: "There may be sinse in that," says he slowly now, and with a delightful air of impartiality—of allowing all things to all men. "But there is wan thing ye must remimber, Miss, he's payin' me (an' dom bad wan

too), to look afther his own, an' how am I to do it, I ax ye, wid him comin' thievin' round here afther me little products? Answer me that!" says Daddledy defiantly.

"But you must see——" begins Nora.

"Divil a ha'porth *I* see, except that me roses is stolen," says Daddledy, who is beyond argument now. "An fegs, Miss Nora, I wouldn't say a word if me repitation wasn't in question. But herself's goin' to give a tinnis party to-morrow or next day, and where'll I be thin, wid me roses? I wouldn't say a word," says Daddledy with dignity, "if he had tuk the blown ones only—'twouldn't matther about *thim*—but he tuk the *buds*—nothin' would do him but the buds, if ye plaze!" (Deep irony here.) "An' be the Vargin, Miss Nora, I spint wan whole hour, countin' thim buds, this mornin'!"

"You must have had very little to do," says Nora, who is out of tune with everything.

"It's mighty sharp ye are, this evenin'!" says Daddledy, cocking up his old head with a disgusted glance at her. This glance, however, widens itself, and dwells upon the pretty face before it with a quickened interest. His small, keen, old Irish eyes, peeping from under the pent brows, see cause for comment in the sweet, sad eyes before them.

"What's the matther wid ye?" asks he, sharply, suddenly.

"Nothing—nothing!" says Nora.

"Is that why yer two eyes is like a furnace?" says Daddledy. He peers a little more. "Who's been scoldin' ye?" asks he.

"Nobody."

"There's a flarin' lie, somewhere," says Daddledy. "Come, out wid it, now. It'll do yer heart good. Has the masther been at ye, agin?"

"No, no."

"Is it anythin' about that gommoch at the Castle? Ferris, I believe ye calls him. Fegs, Ferret would be a thruer name for him."

"Certainly Mr. Ferris has nothing to do with me," says Nora wrathfully. "I really wish, Daddledy——"

"Arrah, be aisy! Why can't an ould man talk to ye? Didn't I see ye as a babby? If it isn't that washed-out creature above there," pointing in the direction of Castle Saggart, "maybe, it's Mr. Carnegie?"

"Oh, if you *must* hear it," says Nora impatiently, "Mr. Carnegie has caused me—that is—he—well, he has worried me."

She makes a movement and goes on, but Daddledy hobbles after her.

"What's he been doin'?"

Plainly there is no getting out of it. Nora stops short, and confronts her old tormentor with a frowning brow.

"He has asked me to marry him!" says she.

"Blessèd hour! an' do ye call *that* worryin' ye? Och! Murder! To think of his takin' sich a fancy to a slip like you!" He pauses here, stroking his chin, and regarding Nora with a fixed stare as if lost in amazement at the idea of *any* sensible man falling a prey to her. "Well, some ginthry *is* fools! An' what did ye say to him?"

"I said 'yes'!" says Nora with a sigh; she is indeed so far gone in melancholy, that she fails to resent his open depreciation of her.

"An' it stuck in yer throat?" says Daddledy, with awful scorn. "Is that what brought the tears to yer eyes? Faix,"—waxing very wrath—"I'm not surprised at yer cryin'! The doin' o' the first sensible action o' yer life must have been a cruel shock to ye." It would be impossible to describe the depth of the sarcasm in this speech. Only one who has known an Irish peasant could understand his capacity for satire.

"I don't want to be sensible," says poor Nora. "I only want to be happy!" A little sob breaks from her, and she raises her handkerchief to her eyes. "According to your showing, to be sensible is to be—*miserable*!"

"Very often, faix!" agrees Daddledy cheerfully. "But not in this case. Ye've settled yourself for life, let me tell ye, an' that most respectably. I didn't give ye credit for so much cleverness. Arrah! stop yer tears, ye omadhaun of a child, an' thank the blessed Vargin for throwing that fool of a man in yer way! 'Pon me fegs I thought he'd sinse in him, but after *this*—don't be talkin' to me!" It is once more plain that Daddledy considers the man who has elected to entrust his happiness to her, a born fool. "'Tis marryin' a juke's daughter he might be," says he.

"I wish he *was*," says Nora. And then, a little stung by his comments, "I may not be a duke's daughter,

Daddledy, but still—*everyone* has not such a low opinion of me, as you have."

"I can see that for mesilf, me dear!" says Daddledy, unruffled. "Misther Carnegie has let me see that much. Well, some people has great luck, surely! Now, who on airth would ha' thought that a harum scarum creature like you would be ridin' in a coach an' four."

"I wish someone else was going to drive in it!" says Nora dismally, the tears dropping down her cheeks. "I hate him, and his carriages, and servants, and everything; and, oh, Daddledy, I hate to be married at all!"

There is something of an appeal in her tone that touches the old man, who, after all, in his own begrudging fashion, loves the two children who have grown up within his garden as it were.

"They all says that," says he. "I nivir yet see a girl goin' to be married—an' dom glad to be married, mind ye—that she didn't say that she wanted to be in her grave first. 'Tis part of it, me dear. Women are quare," says Daddledy, sinking into deep thought. "The quarest things alive! They'd betther be married nor single. They wants always the whip-hand over 'em, to keep 'em in ordher."

"I'm not going to have a whip-hand over *me*!" says Nora indignantly. If Daddledy had meant to check her tears, and bring her to a sounder state of mind by his speech, he has quite succeeded, but as a fact Daddledy had no such design.

"No!" says he, stroking his chin again. "Thin I'm thinkin' ye're mistakin' yersilf a bit. He looks just like that."

"Like what?"

"Like houldin' his own, faix!"

"And what do I look like?" demands Nora imperiously. She has drawn up her slight, beautiful little figure to its full height, and is looking at him with eyes brilliant, angry, haughty.

"Like a slip of a colleen as y' are!" says Daddledy. "What ails ye at all to-day?" continues he angrily. "D'ye think a man like Carnegie wasn't born to rule the likes o' *you*. To the divil wid yer pride! Isn't he a good man, an' a dacent wan, an' why shouldn't ye bow down to yer own husband?"

"I'll bow down to nobody," says Nora with spirit. The

old man has, in a measure, drawn her away from her despair—there has even been a moment when she could have laughed at him. Even now she can hardly suppress the little smile that used to be such a constant customer at the corner of her lips. To be called “a slip of a colleen” —*that* was funny!

“No, of course ye won’t. The world is gittin’ upside down,” says Daddledy. “Ye don’t know where to look nowadays for anythin’ dacent; I’ve lost me faith in everythin’,” says he. “In man, woman, and child. As for the gossoons, be me word, they’re more knowin’ than their gran’-fathers.”

Nora laughs, a little begrudging laugh, but involuntary.

“Oh, not in everything,” says she. “Your Priest now, Daddledy; in woman, naughty woman, you may have lost faith, but not in your Priest!”

“Fegs, I have thin,” says Daddledy. “What would ye think of Father John Dinneen doin’ me the way he did?”

“What way?”

“I’m tellin’ ye, if ye’ll only hould yer tongue,” says Daddledy crossly. “He came to me wan day last week, an’ says he, ‘Daddledy,’ says he, ‘I want ye to go down to the Maguires,’ says he—ye know, Miss, the Maguires and the Sullivans had a dispute about a pig—a lame ould divil of a pig that wandhered so much about the world that both the Sullivans an’ the Maguires (ye know they live in the same bawn) claimed him for their own. It wouldn’t be like that, only that both the Maguires and the Sullivans lost a pig a month ago, an’ so they were at a loss, an’ they both stoutly believed that the wandherin’ pig was theirs. There was the divil’s row anyway between the Maguires an’ the Sullivans, an’ I, bein’ me uncle’s wife’s cousin to the Maguires, was ast be Father John to go down to thim, an’ spake a paceable word or two. The Sullivans is a bad lot, an’ I said I’d as like stay at home as not. I said it wasn’t a thrade I cared to larn. Fegs, Miss, thim Sullivans would as soon sind a stone at yer head on a moonshiny night, as ate their stirabout. ‘But,’ says Father John, ‘if ye’ll do this thing, Daddledy,’ says he, ‘I’ll see ye shan’t lose by it.’”

“Ah, a reward,” says Nora.

“Just that, Miss! A reward indeed!” Daddledy grows

sarcastic. "Well, I wint on my way rejoicin', thinkin' that, if I succeeded, Father John would have somethin' good in store for me. An' I patched it up wid the Sullivans an' the Maguires and came back to Father John. 'Now,' says I, 'Here I am. They won't go to law,' says I, 'they're as peaceable as doves. What'll ye give me *now*?' " says I.

"'Arrah! what d'ye want, man dear?' says he, as soft as ye plaze.

"'Why ye promised me a reward,' says I.

"'So I did,' says he.

"'What is it?' says I.

"'Me blessin'!' says he.

"'May the devil have you, an' yer blessin',' says I, which maybe wasn't mannerly, Miss, but 'twas what I *meant*, anyway." Daddledy pauses angrily. "He deceived me," says he.

"Yes, yes," says Nora. Her thoughts had flown. Poor old Daddledy, *he* had been deceived, and she—had Cyril been honest towards her? A great wave of misery, of despair, of disbelief in all things, catches her and sways her soul.

The old gardener, gazing at her, sees the increasing pallor of her young face, and says suddenly, kindly for *him* :

"Miss Nora, avick! See now; I believe ye're frettin' always for that young idler at the Castle?"

Nora looks at him for a moment, *such* a look! then, turning suddenly, goes up the garden path and into the laurels beyond—carrying with her her anguish, her despair, her wrath.

CHAPTER LI.

"'Oh! beauty of my heart,' he said,
'O darling, darling mine,
Was ever light of evening shed,
On loveliness like thine?'"

It is a month later. Summer lies dead, yet warmth and beauty still adorn the smiling earth. For golden September is with us, more golden than ever to-day, where, lying back in a wicker chair in the old flower garden, Nora is sitting with a book in her hands but her thoughts far, far away.

From the flower beds around her, moist perfumes rise; she is sitting beneath a barberry tree, and a wealth of

yellow blossoms shed, is making a rich carpet at her feet.
Some late roses are blooming near her, and over there,

"Asters of palest, delicatest blue,
Slender and fragile, lift their golden eyes,
Adoring, to the sun, whose warm kiss dries
Their tears of dew."

Ferris is staying at Mrs. Vancourt's place in England. So much Nora has learned, indirectly and without enquiry. It would have seemed to the girl impossible to ask a question about him—even the smallest—although her heart for ever troubles itself about him.

There is this greater trouble in it—in that much gall is mingled with the sweetness of the love that once she bore him. There is nothing on earth so mournful as the slow awakening to the knowledge that the idol one has reared for oneself, and loved and worshipped, is made of the impurest clay after all.

Beaten in on Nora's brain for ever is the memory of that last meeting with Ferris. Every tone, every glance is clear to her, to her everlasting grief. That he—that *he* should prove himself a thing of naught—he, to whom she had given all her heart's best love! The knowledge of his dishonour seems to have dishonoured herself, so closely did she hold him in her regard; and severe as the stab of a knife that gives a death-wound, was the awakening to that knowledge.

Sophie is always sympathetic, but even to Sophie, for very pride's sake, she could not reveal the misery she endured when first she heard that he had gone to stay with Mrs. Vancourt for the shooting. Of course it had not been *only* Mrs. Vancourt—it was all strictly proper. The house had been "crammed with guests," according to Miranda, who always knew everything, and had perhaps purposely increased the number of Mrs. Vancourt's guests, to give Nora comfort. But it was sorry comfort always, and the girl drooped and pined, and went about the house like a small ghost, sad, and out of heart.

It seems to Nora, sitting here in the sweet evening sunlight, and letting her thoughts run backward, that if she could only have remembered him with kindness, that though he were dead, swept away from her for ever on life's stream—she could still have known happiness; but to remember him always as false, dishonoured, disloyal. . . .
That is hard.

The book slips from her lap and falls to the ground. As she stoops to pick it up, the light lifting of a latch in the little garden gate catches her attention. She colours faintly; it is Carnegie, of course—she sighs quickly and resignedly. His coming is inevitable! He is always here—*of course*.

Carnegie steps across the shaven grass towards her, with a smile upon his lips. There is, however, a certain sense of uneasiness in his smile. He looks a little nervous, and this look, sitting on his strong kindly face, is so out of place there, that it is the more remarkable. Will Nora receive him graciously or coldly? Yesterday it was coldly, and coldly it was, too, the day before. Alas! the days when his reception is a gracious one are few and far between, yet the very capriciousness of the girl has its charm for him.

He looks at her now, and seeing her lovely head turned towards him (sometimes it is not so turned, sometimes he has had to announce himself, and all through little Madam's wilfulness), he takes heart of grace, and his step grows quicker. Plainly this is one of her gracious days—like one of those first sweet days after she had accepted him.

She had made herself wonderfully charming then. Her spirits had been so wild indeed, that even *he* had been startled by them. The poor child had hoped that Ferris would have heard of her engagement, and how happy she was in it, and have known thereby some little suffering, a faint, *faint* touch of the suffering that is desolating her young heart. And Ferris, as a fact, *had* heard, and had suffered in his own way, but had held to his word with Mrs. Vancourt all the same, and had left the country without seeing Nora again.

There had been a little scene with Mrs. Vancourt two or three nights after his final interview with Nora. It took place in the conservatory—a room, alas! filled with recollections of that little sweet girl, to whom, in truth, all his most unworthy love was given.

"I have heard of your meeting her again," Mrs. Vancourt had said, her small, vivid face aflame. "Are you mad? Will you drive me to a decision? You know *what that* will mean to you. You *shall* break with her."

"I have broken with her," said Ferris hoarsely, to whom the memory of a little, pale, beautiful, despairing face is

still too fresh, "as you so demanded ! Though why one should break an ordinary friendship——"

"I don't like ordinary friendships with pretty girls, with the man who has asked me to marry him," said Mrs. Van-court calmly. "And, if only an ordinary friendship, why do you look like that ? It must have been a most extraordinary friendship to bring that pallor round your lips."

It had ended there, and Ferris had gone to England to her place for the partridge shooting. It is now September, and he still is there, as Nora knows. One's friends are always so willing to impart the news one hates.

All that, seems long ago now. Nora had perhaps a vague last hope that when he heard of her engagement to Carnegie, he would find it impossible to let it continue, and would have come back to her. But he has not come back. And now all—*all* is at an end.

As for Carnegie—at first, so sweet the girl had seemed, in that strange, wild burst of excitement, that meant despair, that followed on his engagement to her—that joy unrestrained had entered into him. Never in all his life had he felt so light, so joyous. Not for one moment did he suspect that Nora cared for anyone. He knew she did not care for him, but to get her heart-whole, why that only meant time. With a heart free from love, why she would learn to love him by-and-by, and very soon too, if it be true that love begets love.

He had spent a lonely life enough. There had been no family ties. He had no sisters, and only one brother, a most uncongenial one, and was left an orphan very early. Happiness—through Nora—had suddenly become known to him. His heart had grown light ! That first scene with her, when she had fainted, he had put down to agitation, and had thought little of it. A child like that—of course she had been disturbed. There was nothing in that little agitation of hers. And he would be good to her. So good. He felt as if he was the lightest-hearted, the happiest man in all the world. A very little more happiness, and he told himself, with a laugh, that he could have flown. He laughed at the folly of his own conceit ; but it seemed very real to him all the same. Oh ! for the "little more" ; if he had it, he could have flown to *her* daily, hourly.

As it was, he went to Dunmore daily, on horseback

mostiy. He used to take the horse round to the stables himself, and then come and hunt for her in house and garden. He would not have her remain at home for him, if any amusement called her forth. He was in all things, indeed, her willing slave—a slave unappreciated, undesired, unloved !

“I have found you, Nora,” says he, advancing. Nora’s exquisite face is towards him. The last bars of sunlight are falling athwart it. They seem to catch, to hold her. She seems to him an embodiment of the beauty of this clear evening—in unison with it, as it were, for

“ Her presence is Spring through the world ”

for him, and is it not always spring-time when she is near ?

“Yes, yes,” says Nora, rising.

She gives him her cool little hand. He looks at her for a moment, as if gauging her humour, and then, feeling he dare not go a step further, presses it to his lips.

Once, once only, he had kissed her. He could never forget the scene that followed on it. It was slight, delicate ; but yet he had sworn to himself after that, that he would never kiss her again, until—things were at a happier pass between them. He had been almost tempted to withdraw altogether, to renounce his claim to her—but he *could* not. Her very coldness increased her charm for him.

Just now, she is smiling—perhaps that late thinking of Ferris—Ferris, who had abandoned her—has compelled her to see Carnegie in a better light. At all events, she gives him a very kindly reception.

“I am so glad you have come,” says she. “Because I have had no one to speak to for half-an-hour, and half-an-hour of one’s own thoughts means *something*, I can tell you.”

“Something for some other poor wretch ?” says he, seating himself beside her.

“Oh ! no. Only dulness for oneself.”

“But how are you so alone ? Where is Sophie ? ”

She laughs, and shakes her head.

“What a question ! With Denis, of course ! You know Sir Fell disapproves of Denis, but then Sophie approves, and that makes all the difference. I like Denis. Don’t you ? ”

"Very much. More than I can say. As a brother-in-law I shall admire him even more."

"That is like you," says Nora, prettily. "I shall tell Sophie that. It will please her. Not that she wants to be prejudiced in your favour. She is your friend already, heart and soul."

"Ah! I guessed that."

"You *would*! She leaves it very open," says Nora smiling. "Dear old Sophie! She keeps one up. She is so merry——"

"Merry! She is the merriest person I know," says Carnegie, to whom indeed Sophie is dear. Is she not his friend? Has she not helped him to his desired haven?

"Ah! she should be," says Nora. "She loves Denis."

"And he loves her!"

"He does indeed."

"And I love you."

"Yes. You have said so."

"And you believe it?"

"Yes, yes, indeed."

"And you?" He is looking at Nora, and suddenly she lifts her eyes and looks at *him*. There is such trouble in the sweet depths of her eyes, that the man in him rises, and refuses to accept the pain he has evoked.

"Don't speak. I should not have asked," says he hurriedly. "Nora, there is time—time—time for you and me. You," he takes her hand and holds it closely, "you like me, at all events. You think of me as a friend. So far we have got?"

"Yes. A friend. You *are* a friend," says Nora, letting her hand lie quietly in his. "I know it. I feel it."

"But to be only a friend, for ever. Nora! can I do nothing—say nothing. Is it impossible to you to regard me with a deeper feeling?"

He drops her hand, and springing to his feet, paces up and down the shorn grass. He is agitated, pale. All at once he comes back to her.

"Love me, Nora!" entreats he. "*Try* to love me. What is my life to me, if I miss you? *Only* love me."

"If I could," says Nora rising, and looking at him, with frightened eyes. "Oh!—if I could—I *want* to—I do indeed. And it is not so much you ask—you—who are so good, so true——"

"It is a great deal," says Carnegie abruptly: "It means everything to me! And why can't you love me, Nora—my beloved? with your young heart empty—why cannot you give your love to *me*, to me who adores you?"

Nora feels choking. Her lips part. Now—now she must tell him. *Her* heart free! She feels that her face is growing ghastly.

"You—you don't know—I must tell you," she is beginning, when suddenly a sound upon her left the coming of feet—the sound in fact of a footman carrying a tea-tray, upsets her righteous determination to tell Carnegie all the truth; the truth of her fatal love for Ferris . . . that carries in its train an even sadder fact for Carnegie, that her heart is not free to bear a love for him.

But footmen, like Fate, are ever dogging one's footsteps. Miranda, seeing Nora and Carnegie in the garden from an upper window, had desired one of the men to give them their tea out there.

The footman advances with a heavy tread. A little rustic table standing near, he deposits his tray upon it, makes a few deft movements here and there amongst the silver and china, and then carefully withdraws.

Nora rises quickly, goes towards the table, and then busies herself with the sugar and cream, and so forth.

"Well?" asks Carnegie, following her. "You were going to tell me something."

"Was I? I have forgotten it." All at once she has decided upon saying nothing. She had been full of her confession, but that little break caused by the coming of the tea-tray has disarranged all her plans. To tell him. No, it is impossible.

She busies herself about the cups and saucers—giving Carnegie his tea with a little brilliant smile, that warms his heart, and pressing upon him the hot cakes with a gaiety that enchants him. . . . How can he guess that the gaiety is born of a reaction—a reaction from fear, and misery, and humiliation?

There are more reactions than one, however. Before she has quite finished pouring out the tea, and dallying delicately with the cups and saucers, the sudden gaiety that had caught her has died down. The swift sweet flush has fled her cheeks, the light has gone from her eyes. She grows so pale, indeed, that Carnegie, who has seldom his eyes off her, notices the change.

"How pale you are," says he suddenly.

"Am I?"

"Yes."

"You imagine things."

"No. Your cheeks are whiter than they used to be; whiter than they were an hour ago."

"You were not here an hour ago. How can you know?"

"I do know for all that. What is it, Nora?" He looks anxiously at her.

"The heat. You should make an allowance for the heat," laughing—it is rather a meagre laugh, however.

"Well; it certainly is warm for September," says he, slowly, as if only half convinced. "But I sometimes think you want change. That would set you up."

"Oh, never mind me, says Nora, laughing again, a little impatiently however, this time. "Don't talk about *me*. I am not interesting. Tell me some news. What of our friends? Any marriages or making of marriages? Come, amuse me. I *want* to be amused."

"News. Nothing that I can think of. Nothing certainly that you do not know. The friends that I have here, are your friends too. So of course you know all about them."

"That doesn't follow. We go out so little, Sophie and I, that perhaps some small interesting item has escaped us. Of course I don't expect to hear anything thrilling. Anything," laughing softly again, "likely to disturb my rest. Still—any little trifle I shall accept with gratitude."

"Even a crumb, I don't believe I have to offer. But let us go through the latest intelligence," entering into her mood and laughing too. "I feel like the *Court Circular*," says he, "but certainly not so up to date. To begin. Of course you have heard about Ferris."

"Ferris? Cyril?" it is so great a surprise, that her blood stands still within her veins, so that she grows neither pale nor red. Cyril! What is he going to tell her about Cyril?

"Why, haven't you heard?" says Carnegie all unconscious, and seeing nothing in her unchanged face to warn him. "Well! I was perfectly certain you would have heard about him—he was such a friend of yours and Sophie's. Why he is engaged to be married after all to that little widow, who was staying at Saggart—you remember her?"

Mrs. Vancourt. Stupid little person I thought her, but of

course she had money. They are to be married before Christmas."

Nora leans forward. A mad desire to save herself—to hide her secret—to say something that will lead him off the track, is fighting for mastery. But alas! The battle goes against her. Nature wins. Her tongue cleaves to the roof of her mouth. In one horrible, awful moment, all the past lies bare to her—all her love—her hopes. Never until now—*now*, when she has really lost him—does she perhaps altogether realize the fact that he has gone from her; gone for ever; swept utterly out of her life. Engaged. So soon. So soon! So——

Oh! what is it? What is happening to her? The grass—what is the matter with the grass? Why does it rise up at her?

She rises, too, as if to ward off the soft green sward, throwing out her arms a little wildly. . . . Carnegie catches her.

Her unconsciousness lasts only for a moment or two.

"Forgive me!" says Carnegie, bending over her as her eyes open; she grows strong enough to see that it is he, and to mark the haggard look upon his face, the sternness—the misery. "Forgive me, I thought you knew! And I"—she never forgets his look, as he goes on—"and I—*knew nothing*."

He puts her back gently on the garden chair, and leaves her. There is something in his air as he walks rapidly away from her that tells her he will not come back again. Her heart begins to beat—is it fear, or joy, or grief that stirs it? To be left alone! Alone! Deserted by *all*! By him who *should* have loved her. By him who *did* love her. Nora's eyes follow Carnegie until he disappears into the evening mist.

CHAPTER LII.

"Down upon Claris heath
Shines the soft berry,
On the brown harvest tree
Droops the red cherry.
Sweeter thy honey lips,
Softer the curl,
Straying adown thy cheeks
Maire, my girl!"

SOPHIE wandering upon the lowest path of the garden that goes by the strawberry banks, is giving way to sorrow. Not

that she is crying. Tears and Sophie, as I have already said, are usually miles apart; but one can be very sorry indeed without making one's eyes hideous. Denis is going back to Dublin to-morrow! To-morrow!

This is the burthen of the song her heart sings as she strolls slowly up and down the strawberry path, as it has grown to be called.

The strawberry leaves, now turning to the most wonderful colour, are on her right, and so is a breach in the wall. Through this breach a young man's head shows presently.

"Sophie!" says he.

"Oh, Denis, is it you?"

"It is. I think it is," says Mr. Butler, struggling over the wall, a basket in his hand.

"I was just thinking of you," says Sophie sadly. "What an angel you are, to come at the very moment I wanted you!"

"I know it. I feel it. I look like it," says Mr. Butler, dropping to the ground, begrimed with dirt and mortar.

"I was longing to see you," says Sophie, who has reached him now, and is beating him into shape with much vigour. The clouds of dust that fly out of him, beneath her hearty hands, testify well to the dust that was *in* him before she started.

"And I to see you," says he. "That goes without saying. But, I say Sophie, lay it on milder *there*! I'm weak on the off shoulder. Don't thump me to death."

"I *never* saw a dirtier boy," says Sophie, still continuing her exertions. "Really, Denis, you're worse than a road after a week's sun. How did you come?"

"On that grand old steed, Shanks' mare," says Mr. Butler, who is evidently not in the least ashamed of himself or his appearance, "a slow old coach, to tell you the truth, but sure."

He sinks down beside her on the bank, close to the laurels that form such an excellent evergreen shield from all passers by.

"But why did you walk?"

"The horses were ploughing, and old Dan was so mad when I asked for a mount that I was afraid to press the matter."

"Nonsense!" says Sophie. "To walk on this broiling day. I believe you're *afraid* of Dan."

"Tut! Afraid. I'm afraid of only one person on earth, and that's you!"

"Then why did you give in to Dan?"

"Because I'm practising. I *know* I shall have to give in to you when we are married, and so I had better learn how to do it beforehand."

"Ah! to *me*," says Sophie. She sighs heavily. "We shall never be married," says she, elevating her brows and giving herself all the expression of one who knows the world is going to come to an end in five minutes or so.

"What on earth do you mean by that?" asks Butler, naturally a little uplifted.

"Don't ask me. You'll hear it soon enough. I," with quite heroic force, "have refrained from telling you up to this, but I suppose—Well," tragically. "No matter!" She pauses, and then, catching sight of the basket in Butler's hand, curiosity gets the better of tragedy. "What have you got there?" asks she.

"Grapes," says Denis, placing the basket on her lap. -

"*Grapes!*" says Sophie.

"Yes. I have an old cousin in Bray, and she sent me some this morning. I have brought them to you," says Denis. "They're very fine. She's as rich as she can be, so she can afford to grow them properly. I know you and Nora like fruit."

"All these!" says Sophie, drawing back the vine leaves and looking into the basket. "But I believe," lifting her eyes suddenly to his, "you have kept none for yourself. *This* is the basket they came in. I can see the postmarks, and they have not been touched."

"What on earth would I touch them for?" says Butler. "What do I want with grapes? I brought them over for you and Nora. Girls like things like that. *I* don't—at least," truthfully, "not much. And I've brought you something else too, Sophie," rather shamefacedly. "I wish it had been diamonds, but——"

He places a charming pearl ring in Sophie's hand.

"There was such a beautiful diamond one there," says he, "but I hadn't the money. When I *have*, Sophie, you shall have it—but I couldn't come back from Cork"—he had gone up to Cork by the morning train, and has just now returned—"without buying you something—and I hope——"

"Oh, Denis!" says Sophie. "Oh, Denis darling!" She flings her arms round his neck and hugs him. "You're begging yourself," says she.

"Not a bit of it," says he, laughing and hugging her vigorously in turn. "And do you like it really? It isn't much, is it? But it's pretty too, and I thought it looked like you."

"It's lovely. Exquisite. I *never* saw so beautiful a ring!" says Sophie, almost crying with delight. "But you mustn't—you really *mustn't*, Denis. You're always giving me things, and I feel sometimes as if I shall land you in the poorhouse at the end. Look at that dear little brooch you gave me—I always wear it—see!" lifting her soft rounded chin to let him look at the little gold merry-thought brooch that lies beneath it. "And those bangles, and the silk stockings, and the gloves, and——"

"Oh, get out!" says Mr. Butler. "One would think I was a general warehouseman. But what did you mean a moment ago, when you said we should never be married?"

"We never *shall* now," says Sophie, with tears in her eyes. "It appears that Sir Fell has the control of our fortunes——"

"Until you are twenty-five."

"Ah, no! that is all wrong. He has control of it for ever. Because, unless we marry a man of whom he approves, he can retain the money. He won't approve of *you*," says Sophie. "He," prophetically, "won't approve of anyone!"

"Good gracious! what a ridiculous will," says Butler.

"A wicked one, I call it. I *did* hope that when I married you, I should have *some* sort of money to give you," says poor Sophie miserably—"but now——"

"It's a blue look out, no doubt," says Mr. Butler, with the utmost cheerfulness. He stretches himself out upon the grass at her feet. "But I expect we'll survive it."

"I don't see how," says Sophie. "We haven't a penny between us, and you are going away to-morrow, and——"

"And I'll forget you," continues he contemptuously, "and marry another girl—isn't that what you're going to say?"

"Indeed it is nothing of the kind," says Sophie indignantly. "There, take your head off my lap. *What* an idea! If I thought you would ever even *look* at another girl, I'd—I'd——"

"Go on!" says he. "What would you do?"

"Nothing!" says she. "And I sha'n't have to do it anyway—because, I know you will love me, as I love you—always! There, put your head back."

"In a moment," says Mr. Butler.

It is a long moment! It contains a very tender passage!

"I say, Sophie!" says he presently, "why can't you cut all this, and marry me at once? I've got *something*, you know, and I'll work, I'll work hard, and though I haven't got much interest still I think I shall get on."

"To be a burthen on you!"

"You're going back to the story book fudge again. Now, *do* think it out; you see if you wait for ever Sir Fell won't let you marry me. He'll stick on to that money, of course. He's like that! And in between he'll worry you to death. Can't you marry me, and try and let us do with the little money I have, until I can make more? To tell you the truth, I can't bear to leave you!"

"I should like to," says Sophie, "but we ought to wait—I think. After all, Denis,"—thoughtfully—"you have never actually asked Sir Fell about marrying me."

"True!" says Denis. "Any use, do you think?"

"No,"—dismally—"I don't. He would only be horrid to you. At least, I suppose so. He was always horrid about Cyril— However,"—quickly—"that's different. He couldn't bear Cyril—who could?—but as to you—you are——"

She pauses and sighs.

"Just so!" says Mr. Butler, filling up the blank complacently. "I know I'm all I ought to be. All anyone could desire of me. But, in the meantime, I don't believe Sir Fell regards me as an eligible *parti*, and, to be just all round, I don't see how he could. We had better give up thinking of Sir Fell, Sophie."

"Yes. I suppose so. But,"—slowly—"there is Miranda."

"My darling girl, Miranda must see as well as Sir Fell that I am an impecunious fellow!"

"Yes, but Miranda likes you," says Sophie. "She hated Cyril, but she likes you—who *wouldn't*? She distrusted Cyril; she believes in you."

"'Who wouldn't?'" quotes Butler, copying her tone to a nicety.

"Well," pinching his ear very severely, which is lying very convenient to her hand; "she is right, isn't she? One *may* believe in you, eh?"

"Oh, yes. Good Heavens! *Yes!*" shrieks Mr. Butler, seizing her hand to prevent further atrocities. "But who could believe in *you*? I feel as if I were at school again after a severe boxing."

"I don't believe you ever got a boxing you didn't richly deserve," says Sophie. "But come back to the point, do. It's so silly of you to be frivolous, when our lives are in our hands as it were!"

"Whose hands? Yours? Very hard little hands," says he, rubbing his ear. "Well, go on. So Miranda is on our side, eh?"

"In a way. She says she knows you are honestly in love with me!" Here they both laugh, and there is another "moment."

"And the funniest part of it all is," says Sophie, "that Miranda openly declares she was never in love herself in her life, so what can *she* know about it?" She laughs again as at some irresistible thought. "*Fancy* Miranda in love!" says she.

Denis becomes the fixed image of despairing thought.

"Ask me an easy one," says he at last.

"After all," says Sophie regretful—rather late it must be confessed—"one shouldn't laugh at her. She is as good as gold."

"And as heavy as lead."

At this they both laugh afresh, as though no word of censure with regard to that laughter had been said.

"She's likeable, I admit that," says Butler presently, as if ashamed of himself. "I agree with you that one shouldn't jeer at her. She's good. She's kind. She's honest, I think. She," he pauses. "She has one great qualification, at all events," says he. "She,"—solemnly—"must be an awful trial to Sir Fell."

At this brilliant burst of wit, they both roar, in the high, gay, light-hearted way of youth, when it is cracking jokes at the expense of its elders. Sophie's and Butler's mirth, however, is short lived.

"Oh, hush! *Hush!*" says somebody just behind them.

* * * * *

CHAPTER LIIL.

"O ! had I all the flocks that graze
 On yonder yellow hill,
 Or lowed for me the numerous herds
 That yon green pasture fill,
 With her I love I'd gladly share
 My kine and fleecy store.
*Ah, Graith mo-chroidhe, mo chailin og,
 Si mailligh mo stoir."*

It is Nora. A breathless Nora, panting, pink, with startled eyes.

"He's coming. He's *here* ! *Run*, Denis, run ! "

" 'A word to the wise is sufficient.' " Mr. Butler is wise. He springs to his feet.

"What ! the Storming Party ? " asks he.

"Sir Fell. Yes," says Nora. "I saw him in the lower part of the garden talking to Daddledy. They were scolding each other very hard. I think Daddledy won the victory, because Sir Fell turned sharply away, and charged up the path that leads to this place. He will be furious with Sophie if he finds you here. He had a scene last night with Miranda about you, and if Daddledy has given him a bit of his own cross old mind, we shan't know how to manage him. Go, Denis. *Do go* ! "

"After all, I won't ! " says Butler with determination. "I'm tired of running away from him. What good does it do ? And why should I run ? I don't care a fig for his tempers."

"Ah, but we do ! " says Sophie.

"You needn't do it any more, anyway," says Denis. "You know what I've been saying. Throw in your lot with mine, and put an end to this tyranny. Say one word, Sophie, and let me stay here, and speak to him about it ! After all, why shouldn't you marry me ? "

"I have told you," says Sophie, with a quick impatient movement. "Do you think I want to ruin you ? There, go. *Go*, Denis ! " giving him a little shove. "Oh ! " with a backward glance. "He is coming. He will visit it all on me. Denis, darling, if you love me, *go* ! "

This is a magic word. Butler, catching her in his arms, gives her an eager kiss, after which he gathers up his loins and flees "over the garden wall."

Not a moment too soon !

"Where is he?" asks Sophie, in a subdued tone, alluding to Sir Fell.

"Sh—*Here!*" says Nora; and, indeed, she and Sophie have barely time to slip on to the grass and assume the expression of two angels lost in heavenly thought, when Sir Fell comes round the corner.

If he had expected to find something worthy of an outburst of wrath, he is mistaken. Here, is only an innocent bit of grass, two mild, serenely thoughtful girls, and a big basket of most excellent grapes.

After all, their arrangements were not *quite* perfect. They had forgotten the grapes.

"H'm. Hah!" says Sir Fell, with all the air of "Fee Fo Fum." "I thought I heard a man's voice here." As he speaks, he beats the bushes near him with his stick.

"I don't think Nora's voice is *specialy* masculine," says Sophie, mildly; "Nora, however, was saying something just now."

"'Prevarication,' Sophia, 'is a mean lie,'" says Sir Fell; quoting, evidently, from an ancient copy-book. "Nora's voice—(one of the most unpleasant, by the way, that I have ever listened to)—is not a man's voice. It is not a bass—it is a squeak."

"Nora's voice a squeak!" says the intrepid Sophie, rising to her feet as well as the occasion—she is always up in arms when there is an attack made upon Nora. "It is the sweetest voice in the world," says she, indignantly. "*Every* one knows that. It—it is—" here her wrath gets too much for her, and her brain deserts her. "It is as sweet as *sugar!*" says she, with an extra emphasis to make up the deficiencies of the comparison.

"I don't like sugar!" says Sir Fell, "if it means Nora's voice." He has been poking about with his stick, and now at last his glance lights on the basket of grapes.

"Hah! What have we here?" says he. "Grapes!" peering into the basket. "Grapes, eh? From Saggartmore, eh?"

"No! They are from Mr. Butler," says Sophie.

"Butler? Eh? Butler," insolently, as if scarcely believing. "And how did they come here, eh? Sent them"—sneeringly—"by his footman, eh?"

"No. He brought them himself," says Sophie, coldly, defiantly.

"Brought them ! Hah ! So now I learn the truth ! He has been here then, that beggar, looking after your fortune ? Here, in *my* place, where he knows he is unwelcome, without a written invitation ? I suppose that strikes you as being heroic conduct, eh ? Romantic ?—sentimental ? Pray when did he leave ? As *I* came up ? Did he run away then ? Ha ! ha !" with his hateful chuckle—"A charming spectacle it must have been, truly. A young man flying from his love, fearing the lash of her guardian. A *preux chevalier* in truth !"

"Do you think he was afraid of you ?" asks Sophie, who is now very pale, and very sorry she told Denis to go away. "*He*, afraid of *you* ! It was *I* who told him to go away. And I am sorry for it now. You talk of a *lash*—I tell you, he—he"—choking with anger—"has a lash too. His right arm is as strong as it need be !"

"Hold your tongue, girl !" says Sir Fell, authoritatively—yet it is beyond question that his voice fails a little ; subdues itself, as it were, beneath the girl's anger. The Bully is ever startled by a threat. "How dare you speak so to *me*," says he—but the ring in his voice has left it—and Sophie standing erect and defiant before him, daunts him even more. "Now, once for all," says he, blustering as well as he can, and using the formula with which he begins all his dictates—"Once for all, I forbid you to have that pauper here—that beggar—that——"

"And, once for all," says Sophie, passionately, imitating him to perfection—"I forbid *you* to call Mr. Butler by any disrespectful name ! Do you *hear* ?" Sophie's usually agreeable eyes are now flashing.

"Be silent, you impertinent girl !" says Sir Fell. But his own eyes fall before hers. As they fall they reach the grapes. "Hah ! Hum !" says he again. "Fine grapes enough !" He stoops, and picks up the basket. "Fine indeed ! I presume that misguided young man meant them for Lady Fell."

He pulls one off the top bunch, and eats it with manifest appreciation.

"Very good ! Very good indeed !" says he. "I shall take them to her." He turns, tucks the basket under his arm, and deliberately stalks away.

"Well !" says Nora—"a more disgraceful theft——Oh ! Sophie, what is it, darling ?"

"Oh, nothing—nothing," says Sophie, who is now dissolved in tears—"Only—I meant to keep some for poor Denis for to-morrow—and now he will get none—and we shall get none—and Miranda will get none either. He will eat them all himself."

"That occurred to me," says Nora, sadly. "I *felt* it, as he lifted the basket. He looked greedy."

"And to think they came all the way from Bray for *him*!" says Sophie.

Her grief breaks forth afresh. It seems to her terrible, that these grapes should have come all the way from Bray, to go down Sir Fell's throat!

CHAPTER LIV.

"I wear a shamrock in my heart
Three in one, one in three—
Truth and love and faith,
Tears and pain and death
Oh! sweet my shamrock is, to me!"

UP here, on the top of the hill, the view is lovely. One can see the river winding and winding between its fern-covered banks, with the trees shedding their leaves into it, as though they were tears. And so it may be that they are; tears for the summer past—tears for the winter so soon to come!

Autumnal tints already show themselves. They are making warm and beautiful the scented wood. The heavy red of the beeches, the yellows of the elms, the glorious orange of the horse-chestnuts. All speak of Death—but how splendidly! If they are going to their graves, these autumn leaves, it is with a high courage, truly, and a great magnificence attends their passing.

Bright gleams of sunshine falling through these blended beauteous tints render them even more exquisite.

Nora, who has climbed the hill to get away from everyone, and have commune with her heart alone, stands lost in admiration of the charms around her.

She is glad of the respite. For the past few days—ever since her last unfortunate interview in the garden with Carnegie indeed—her heart has known no rest. It had become plain to her then, that she had betrayed herself, had let Carnegie know all about that sad secret that renders her desolate hour by hour.

The thought that he has thus learned it, is detestable to her. To tell him. That would be something. Dreadful, horrible—yet *something*. But that he should learn the truth without connivance on her part, ah! that is worse still.

She had meant to tell him. Certainly she had meant that. But she had not been able to do it. And now her “righteous determination” to lay bare to him all the truth, formed so many days ago, has been accomplished—carried through—but without any help from *her*.

Mr. Carnegie *knows*. He knows now all that anyone need know, of her sad love for Cyril Ferris.

At this point the poor child buries her face in her hands and sobs aloud.

Yes, yes. Mr. Carnegie knows. It is noticeable that she never thinks of the man who truly loves her by his Christian name, whereas she always thinks of Ferris by his. Yes, Mr. Carnegie knows now as thoroughly as though she had told him, that her first heart's love has been given away. Away from him. Away to Ferris.

She moves back a little, and as though filled with a curious longing for support in her trouble, she lays her arms round two young saplings close to her, and so stands looking up to heaven, as if calling upon it for deliverance out of all her troubles.

* * * * *

It is thus Carnegie sees her. A slender, exquisite thing. Clinging to those saplings that are so near akin to her in their fragility—their youth——

She is embracing them with both arms. Leaning back as if thinking. Thinking!

“*Vanitas, vanitatum*,” is her inward cry. This cry betrays itself in her face. It is pale, sad, hopeless.

Suddenly she catches sight of Carnegie. She moves back a little, though always clutching those friendly saplings as if desirous of gaining strength from them.

She makes a perfect picture standing thus, and Carnegie, noting all the loveliness of her, feels the pain in his heart grow worse.

He strides up to her; she makes a little attempt at receiving him, but he waves such courtesies aside.

“Why did you not tell me?” says he, in a low tone, but one fraught with passion.

“Tell you—tell you?” repeats she. She is very pale.

"Yes. Why did you not tell me at first? I was worth so much consideration at your hands, I suppose? Any honest man is worth that. Why didn't you tell me?"

"Why *should* I tell you?" says she, with a sudden swift defiance. "You didn't care."

"I?"

"No, you didn't! you only wanted *me*. To marry me! My face pleased you. It has pleased many. I wish," with a terrible look in that same lovely face, "that I could change it—alter it—destroy it!" Her thoughts have gone to Ferris, and *his* admiration of her face, and all that came of it! A lovely face—a broken heart! What has she gained?

"What are you saying?" says Carnegie sternly.

"It is true. All true! You knew I did not love you—I *told* you that: you listened: you did not even then care to ask me if I loved anyone else!"

"*Nora!*"

"No—no, no!" throwing out her pretty arms with a gesture full of anger. "It is true. You asked me *nothing!* It did not interest you, I suppose!"

"You must be mad to talk to me like this," says Carnegie.

"I am not mad," says Nora. "You pretend now that you care. But really *then*, you didn't."

"Is that true?" asks he icily.

She turns upon him a frowning face. Her pallor has disappeared. A sharp crimson flush is dyeing her cheeks red. Each change of thought makes her the more beautiful.

"True? *True?*" repeats she haughtily.

She looks at him as a little queen might look.

"It is *not* true!" says he fiercely—too much in earnest to think of apologizing. "There was something said that day when I was absurd enough to ask you to marry me. Surely *then*, I asked you—if—anyone had loved you before."

"Well?" She stands back from him, with her charming head uplifted, and a quick disdain upon her lips. "I said, 'No.' That was the truth."

"*That* the truth!" He looks at her almost as if he would like to kill her, as she stands there before him—defying him! defying the love that is throbbing in his heart for her, defying his constancy, his truth, his honest desire.

"You seem determined to give me the lie," says she, in a

cold metallic little tone, and with a gesture of contempt. "But—there is *no* lie." She pauses. A great spasm of misery contracts her throat. Oh! that it *was* a lie. How gladly would she have uttered it. "He—" She looks at him suddenly, and with great anguish on his own part he reads there *her* anguish—the grief that lies both in her eyes and voice. "He—never—loved me!"

"Still—you should have told me," says he, feeling suffocated.

"Well, you know it all now," says the girl wearily.

"Now—*now*," vehemently. "Now, when it is too late!"

"I can't see why it should make any difference," says she.

"To you!" says he hotly. "None to you—but to me——" He stops suddenly, as if afraid that the anger within him will break loose, and conquer him. "Your heart is not touched! My going away—my leaving you—would doubtless be a relief to you——"

He stops again, looking at her, waiting for a reply. If he had hoped to hear her deny this supposition of his—he is disappointed.

She stands mute before him, with hands clasped, and eyes downcast, and pale lips firmly closed. Such a little fragile creature, with such a strength of will.

"It is better that our engagement should come to an end," says Carnegie, after a long, long study of that down-bent face. "I can see no happiness in it for either you or me. With your heart still filled with that——fellow——" —he smothers the adjective—"I don't see how you could think——" He makes an impetuous gesture. "Good Heavens!" says he. "Why can't you face it? Why can't you see that you have had an escape from him?"

Nora turns deadly white.

"You *have* had an escape," says he, repeating himself almost unconsciously, because so troubled by that sudden change of colour in her face.

"I know that," coldly.

"This fresh engagement of his is hardly to his credit," goes on Carnegie. "Mrs. Vancourt has not only a temper, but a—fortune."

"And I have only a temper, and *no* fortune," says Nora. She breaks suddenly into a most cruel laugh; it seems to catch her, and hurt her, shaking all her slender body. "I am poor, indeed," says she.

And then, all at once, her laughter ceases. She lifts her hands to her face, and bursts into a storm of tears.

Carnegie, not daring, in his present state of mind, not *caring* indeed, to touch her, turns aside. He walks from the beech tree underneath which they have been standing, to an elm, far over there, but hearing her sobs cease, comes back to her.

"You love him still then?" says he. His voice is very low, and calm.

"I don't know," says Nora.

CHAPTER LV.

"Long thy fair cheek was pale,
Ere a ruin,
 Too well it spake thy tale,
Ere a ruin,
 Fondly nursed hopes betrayed,
 All anguish there portrayed,
Ere a ruin."

"You don't know?" says Carnegie; his tone almost contemptuous. Yet he would have given all his possessions to be able to take her in his arms at this moment, and sooth away her grief.

"*How* am I to know?" says Nora. "It is impossible to know. I think him false—dishonourable!" She confesses this bravely, but the confession seems to tear a hole in her heart. "And yet," says she faintly, "to so think of him—you can see—that it—*hurts* me!"

She lifts her hand and lays it on her heart. She has grown so deadly white that terror seizes upon Carnegie. She looks indeed as though "Siva, the Destroyer," had laid his hand upon her.

Presently the colour comes back to her face.

"To acknowledge him as false—to know him dishonourable—that is the beginning of the end," says Carnegie slowly. "The strongest love in the world could scarcely outlive that! I am satisfied there! And now—one more question."

"Oh! *no!*" says she faintly. Something in his air perhaps, the quick light in his eyes, warns her about this question.

"Yes. One!" persists he with determination. If her first lover has been weak and vacillating, her second lover is certainly strong, and goes always to the point.

"Do you think, Nora—answer me straight now—do you think it possible, that in the future, you could ever love me, as you thought you loved him?"

He could not refrain from that thought. A sort of mad desire to disbelieve in her love for Ferris possesses him.

"What a ridiculous question," says Nora drawing in her breath.

"Answer it however!" He is standing before her, tall and stern.

"How can I? What do I know about the future?" Her slim hands clasp each other, and she moves her head, just once, from side to side, as a creature might who has been caught and thinks of liberty.

"None of us know much, but most of us can form a guess. We can all imagine how it will be in the future." His tone is growing sterner every moment. "You seem to me to have a great deal of imagination. Well?"

He is looking at her, frowning, inexorable. After one swift glance at him, she remains silent. It is a battle *à deux*.

"Answer me!" says Carnegie imperiously.

"I shall not!" returns she, slowly.

"That is useless," says Carnegie; his passion, his grief, his rage against his own fate is now so strong, that he sweeps all barriers aside, and, though knowing his own strength, still deliberately uses it against her. After all it is an easy question to answer. It need not hurt *her*; but it is safe to hurt *him*. His victory (he has decided on victory) will crown his death warrant and not hers. Even as he persists he knows this. It is crying itself aloud in his beating heart. He looks at her.

"I am waiting," says he icily.

Nora shakes her head. She would have liked to say something to have defied him to the death; but words fail her. A strange sense of fear has overcome her. The hand in which she holds the flower with which she is trifling is trembling visibly, and her lips are white.

"Speak!" says Carnegie with authority.

Suddenly she flings the flower from her with a supreme passion.

"Must I speak?" she turns on him great desperate eyes, brilliant with anger, and grief, and all the terrible things that go to make up the sum of life's despair. "If you *will* hear the truth then—*hear* it! No, no no! A thousand times 'No!'"

There is a long pause. A dead silence. At last :

"What am I to understand by that?" asks Carnegie. His tone is quite calm now, quite even.

"What you will!" sullenly.

At this answer his wrath overpours. To treat him like this! He, who had loved her honestly when that other devil had given her a love only worthy of disdain. Yet to that fellow's memory she gives a kinder regard than to his present love.

Carnegie for the first time in all his sober life feels a little mad. He turns upon her with somewhat distended nostrils, and a rather violent manner.

"How dare you speak to me like that?" cries he, catching her hands and holding her. "Am I nothing?—is all the world only *him*?—That damned fellow who loved you just so long as it suited him. He——" Nora at this moment makes a violent effort to release herself from him, but he holds her fast.

"No, stay! stay and hear me!" says Carnegie. "I have called *him* a devil, but what are you? What have you done to me? you have ruined my life, destroyed me. Where am I to look if I leave you behind me. There is no beyond then—nothing!"

He pauses. She is standing quite still. "In all her face is not one drop of blood."

"Did you never think of *me*, when thinking of him?" demands he, passionately. "Have I had no feeling? Did you never think I could love you better than he could? Have you a heart *at all*! There! go!"

He releases her. "What a fool—what an idiot I must be—to love you—as—" his passion dies away, despair marks the quiet of the end of his sentence—"as *I do*?"

"I—I—you are unfair to me," says Nora in a stifled tone. She makes a step forward. He intercepts her.

"Unfair to you? *I*? And you to me? How is that?"

She would have passed by him but again he prevents her.

"*You* to talk of unfairness!" cries he suddenly. "And to *me*! I—who could *kill* you?"

He is ghastly.] The girl can see that. And what a strain he is laying on himself.

"Pshaw," says he suddenly, "you are not worth it. There, go—go!"

He draws back as if to let her pass him by.

But Nora, as if rivetted to the spot, makes no stir. She is looking at him (though he is certainly not looking at her) like one mesmerized. This change in him! This outburst! This new phase of his character! She is lost in a wild conjecture. *Is* this the Mr. Carnegie she has known—or another?

She had up to this regarded him as a usual—a *very* usual person, calm, stolid—a little too stolid perhaps, but certainly a person to be relied on. She had not for a moment doubted the genuineness of his affection for her (she had always called it affection—not love), but she had always marked that affection at a low price.

It would last probably, she had told herself; it would be constant, true, but it would never rise above a calculated level.

Yes, it would be an affection always. *Never* a passion! He would regard her tenderly, treat her perfectly. Once his wife, she would be part of his dignity, and therefore (so good he is) he would give her all the courtesies that a princess might demand. And when she died——

Well, if she were to die, he would be sorry too! Very sorry! He would feel an honest regret—a calm, a gentle regret—a regret as calm as himself, and one decorous year afterwards he would marry again — just as calmly, as tenderly, as decorously.

This had been her explanation of him up to this present hour.

But now—now! Now where are all her beliefs, her prognostications? Now, looking on this man before her, with his white face and angry eyes, her foolish girlish ideas fall asunder. They are smashed to atoms!

What a storm, what a tempest has broken out—born of—evoked by this once calm, silent, presumably unfeeling, man!

She stands staring at him, with frightened eyes, as if seeing him for the first time. As indeed, she now does see him.

His passion ennobles him! His face, handsome always, has gained in beauty—in power. His tall and distinguished figure seems to *grow*. She trembles before it. Her eyes fall. She falls back a pace or two, and with a nervous gesture seeks support from an old beech tree that stands

behind her. Her little face is sad to the last degree. It looks as though never again will gladness visit it.

"Marvell no more altho'
The songs I sing do mone,
For other life than wo,
I never proved none."

And indeed, the poor child's life has been "wo" all through.

Carnegie, towering above her, becomes suddenly conscious of the great contrast between them. He, tall, towering over her, she, so small—so fragile—so very, very pale.

By what right does he seek to terrify this little creature? And indeed, there *is* terror in her eyes!

His face softens. All at once, in a hopeless sort of way, he knows he has forgiven her. He turns aside as if he cannot bear to look again upon her, with his new swift pardon in his mind.

"Forgive me, Nora," says he, frowning still, and staring at the bank opposite—the dropping leaves of the elm—the flying clouds overhead—at *anything* but her! "I have been rough, a brute to you—but——"

"Oh, no! No!" She breaks into tears again.

He goes to her, filled with contrition.

"You are all the world to me," says he, in a choked voice. "I love you better than my life—and yet—I have made you cry. You will think of that always. You will never forget that—I have hurt you——"

"Don't mind me!" says she, half-childishly, wholly forlornly, checking her sobs, and biting her lips. "And besides," bravely, "I am not crying now."

"No?" He draws his fingers softly across her long, wet lashes.

"Well—it is not your fault," says she, flushing.

"No. I suppose not." His face darkens—hardens again. No, not for *him* her tears are shed, he tells himself. "But after all, it was I who drove you to tears!" says he. "But for me, you would not have cried to-day. And why should I torment you? Why should I annoy you with my worries? It is my own affair all through. I should not have spoken so to you. It does not touch you. Why should you care? I have forgotten myself. But I ask you to forgive me, as it is a *last* offence." He pauses, and then goes on more steadily. "I shall not trouble you

again. We shall make an end of it all to-day. You and I—and *here!*”

“You mean——?” says she.

“To give you back your liberty; to set you free. To make you happy again,” says he gently.

It is the old gentleness. After the one break in it, it comes back to her with a greater sweetness in it than she had ever recognized before.

She says nothing. She is thinking. A very big space out of her past life seems to be widening before her; and in it stand out clearly one lover—and—one *friend!*

She has lost her lover—is she to lose her friend too? Are all things to go from her? And this friend! This friend who loves her, though she can’t love him! To lose this kind friend!

How few are they who love her! Sophie. Only Sophie! And what of Miranda?—well yes, Miranda loves her too, perhaps. But there are only these two in all the world who would care whether she lived or died, except—except this man who is looking at her now, with sad, reproachful eyes.

“You *will* forgive me, Nora?” says he.

CHAPTER LVI.

“Waiting, sad, dejected, weary,

Waiting for the May.

Spring goes by with wasted warnings,
Moonlight evenings, sunbright mornings,

Summer comes, yet dark and dreary

Life still ebbs away.

Man is ever weary—weary,

Waiting for the May!”

“You make me feel so guilty!” says Nora, in a low voice, twisting her fingers nervously. “It is you who have to forgive! I know that. I feel it. I wish—I *wish* I could be more to you—but,” suddenly—“Don’t go. Don’t leave me!”

“*Not leave you?*” He looks at her amazed. A quick, dark flush reddens his brow. He had believed she would be glad of her release, and now, she is entreating him to stay!

“No. Don’t. Try not to hate me. If you love me, and,”—gazing at him anxiously, as if trying to read his face—“you *do*, don’t you?”

She pauses, as if hanging on his reply, and he makes a little movement of assent. Words are beyond him! How

can he answer her calmly, quietly, with her little, lovely face gazing into his with such sad earnestness in it? He feels choked. If she loved him, and feared to lose him, she would be looking at him just like this. The situation is perfect for *that* part. And—oh! the irony of it—it is perfect for this part too, where love has found no resting place for his foot.

"Well! Then you will *like* to stay with me," says she, with conviction. She says it quickly. "Although," forlornly, "I know I am a great trouble to you."

"The greatest trouble of my life!" replies he bitterly. "And yet the greatest joy. I will stay if you wish, Nora. But," gravely, "what is the good of my staying? What is to be the outcome of it? You may marry me—you probably *will* marry me—feeling lovely now. But you don't love me, and—probably again—you never will love me. It is a risk. A horrible risk. For I tell you this," says he—turning quickly to her—"a time comes for everyone in this life—a time to love. And if, when married to me, your heart awoke again for another—and not for me—No. No——" breaking off hurriedly. "It would be too dangerous an experiment for you—and me!"

"My heart will not awake again!" says she, listlessly, sadly, drearily.

Perhaps, indeed, she hardly realizes the meaning of the words.

"That is encouraging," says he with a curious laugh. "On the head of that declaration, you would still advise me to marry you." He looks at her strangely. "It is astonishing!" says he at last. "You elect to marry me. I am to be your husband, yet of all men in this abominable earth I am the one you think least about. Good Heavens! Surely I am worth a *little* consideration!"

"But I want you to know how it is. I want you——"

He interrupts her.

"Better," says he, gloomily, "to end it all now. Now, at once. For your sake! I think of you, Nora, though you never think of me. You will be happier when I cease to be part of your life."

There is a slight pause then.

"As you will," says the girl, coldly.

He turns away from her and goes down the hill. He is quite determined now. His heart is full of a great strength

—the strength of renunciation. It lasts him about a minute and a half, then he stops.

'To pause is always fatal. Carnegie, like that poor Mrs. Lot, looks back !

And there is Nora. A silent, beautiful Nora, with her hands clasped loosely before her, and her blue skirts swayed by the wandering wind.

So sweet she looks, that his heart dies within him. *How* can he leave her ? And yet to stay ! What is she to him ? What can she ever be ?

" Light as the foam that flecks the seas,
Fitful as summer's sunset breeze,
As transient as morning dew,
Mere waste of time."

For all that he goes back to her, and takes her hands and crushes them passionately against his breast.

"I cannot leave you, Nora," says he. "My life is bound up in yours. I *have* no life without you. Yet—one thing, Nora. Tell me one thing."

He lets her hands go, and taking her face between his palms turns it to him. He, by a slight gesture, a very gentle one, compels her to return his gaze, to look from her eyes into his.

"You feel no *dislike* about marrying me ? You feel no repugnance ? Be honest with me in this," entreats he.

"I shall be honest always," says the girl, tears springing to her eyes—the eyes looking into his. And yet she hesitates. Hesitates fatally. It seems to her as though she *cannot* speak. As though her tongue is cleaving to the roof of her mouth. *How* to express her meaning ? At last she forces herself to speak ; but when she does so, her words are meaningless. "Dislike ? No, no," mutters she. "But—" she breaks off miserably "*Nothing* seems to matter !" cries she wildly, bitterly. "And you—you are always kind."

He drops her hands as if stung.

"I see ! I understand ! Yes, I shall always be kind to you. You may depend upon so much, Nora." He points towards where the tall chimneys of her house can be seen. "You can find your own way back ?"

"Yes, yes. But—you are angry with me again ?"

"No," gloomily. "I have been angry with you once too often, to-day. I shall never be angry with you again."

"Ah! that means——"

"It means nothing," says he distinctly. "And even if it did, what harm is done? You need not care. Nothing matters to *you*, you say!"

He turns and walks rapidly down the hill, leaving the slight blue-robed figure gazing after him with some new, strange, wild discomfort tearing at her breast.

CHAPTER LVII.

"The power and the splendour of thrones pass away."

AFTER a full hour's inconsequent wandering through the woods, she turns her steps homeward, her arms laden with upland spoil, long sprays of the blackberry bush, now just turning crimson, and tender lichens, the strong, straight branches of the bracken fern, and a handful of the gaudy yellow toad-flax.

There is a big old jar in the hall in which she can arrange all these treasures, and it has given her a relief from her late troubled thoughts to gather them.

The hall door is wide open; this strikes her as strange—and stranger still is the deadly silence of the hall as she enters it. When she has got as far as the hanging lamp, she stops, realizing all at once that there is *something*. That something has happened. But what?

There may or may not be such occult things as presentiments, but it is certain that at this moment Nora feels a sense of coming evil. It falls upon her heart.

She stands quite still, with a frightened, expectant look upon her face—the autumn trophies of her walk still clasped in her hands.

How deadly, deadly silent it all is! She trembles. She takes a step forward, and then stops again, and suddenly cries:

"Sophie!" in a quick, sharp, agonised way.

Almost as she utters the name—in answer to it, as it were, the library door opens, and Sophie comes slowly into the hall. It is plain that she had *not* heard Nora, however, because she starts as she sees her, and goes quickly to her.

"Sophie—Sophie——"

"Oh! Hush! hush!" cries Sophie in a terrified whisper, making an impressive upward movement with her hands.

She is as white as her usual soft ruddiness will permit, and her eyes are distended as though by a great shock. There are traces of tears on her cheeks, and her lips are tremulous.

"What? What is it?" gasps Nora, shrinking away from her. Her very soul seems dying within her.

It is *death*! Of *that* she is sure. But whose death. Not Cyril's! Oh! not his, that would be too impossible. There is a limit placed to unhappiness as well as happiness, and oh—*that* could not be, and—and it could not be—his—Mr. Carnegie's—either. Why she had seen him only an hour ago.

Strangely enough, her thoughts never go nearer home. Sophie is before her, and Miranda! She has grown very fond of Miranda, but who could ever think of Miranda as even *ill*? And as for Sir Fell—

"Come in here, Nora," says Sophie, opening once again the library door.

"No. Tell me here—now!"

The agony on Nora's face frightens Sophie.

"It is Sir Fell!" says she, in a low, faint tone.

"Come—come, I tell you, in here, and you shall know all."

She draws Nora into the library.

"*Sir Fell*!" says Nora. "He is ill then? An accident, Sophie?" She has grown calm again to a certain extent, but still looks frightened.

"Oh, worse than that." Sophie's voice has sunk even lower now, now that the strain of the first telling has worn off. It has sunk very low—to that sad whisper indeed that comes as if by instinct even to the very youngest, and least experienced in death's sad offices—when the last shadow of all lies over a house.

"He is dead, Nora!" says she solemnly.

"Dead!" Nora looks at her as if not understanding.

"Dead! Sir Fell is *dead*!" It seems so impossible that Sir Fell should ever be dead.

"Oh! yes. Oh, yes!" says Sophie, breaking into bitter weeping. She had not cared for the dead man, she had perhaps disliked him even more than ordinary; but now the great King Death has touched her, and frightened her into tears.

"Dead," says Nora again, as if stunned.

"Yes. Yes, I tell you!" in great agitation. "We found him, Miranda and I. Oh, Nora!" She presses

her hands to her eyes, as if to shut out some horrid sight. "It was dreadful—dreadful. I never saw anyone dead before! And his *face*! Oh! Oh!"

This sudden renewal of the awful distress she has been enduring, and which she has so bravely kept down with a view to breaking the direful news gently to her sister, renders her almost incapable of thought for the moment.

Nora goes to her, and throws her arms round her. She squeezes her to her in the tenderest embrace. Her own fear has been overcome in the thought of Sophie's fear. All that Sophie has had to bear whilst she has been plucking flowers in the wood comes home to her, with a miserable sense of selfishness on her own part. And yet she had not known. She feels somehow as though she *should* have known.

"Don't talk. Don't! Sit down," says she. "Oh, Sophie darling, to think you should have been there. What a shock!"

"Yes, it was a shock."

"Then don't talk about it."

"Oh! I must," says Sophie. "It is such a relief to me to tell you all about it. It was his heart, the doctor said."

"*His* heart!" The expressive emphasis is involuntary. She had suffered a good deal at his hands. "The doctor said that?"

"Yes. Something wrong with it. He died quite quietly."

"He died." Nora repeats the words mechanically. He died—he is dead. It is so small a measure of time since last she saw him, well, full of health and years apparently. And now he is dead.

Sophie has been talking in a miserable, idle sort of way.

"We sent at once; but the doctor was out—a visit to Mrs. Somers, I believe. When he came, he said the heart must have been bad for years. He examined him; but it was no use. He was quite dead! Oh, Nolly, I wish we had not been so—that is, I wish we had been nicer to him."

"So do I," says Nora. They are both as much stricken with remorse for their justifiable dislike to the late Sir Fell, as though that late Sir Fell, who in his lifetime had dwarfed and desolated their lives, had been a saint, martyred by their misconduct.

"You found him?" asks Nora, after a long pause, and in an awed tone.

"Yes," shuddering. "Miranda and I—after luncheon. We had had a little argument about one of those late geraniums, she and I, and we agreed to go straight to the conservatory and see who was right. We went there, and—right at the end we saw Sir Fell—in that old, long wicker chair! You know it?"

"Yes; I know it."

"And Miranda said, 'There is Sir Fell.' He looked quite natural! I never thought of anything! We went on—down the conservatory, to where the geranium was, that we wished to see, and suddenly, as we were looking at it, Miranda turned round and looked at Sir Fell again, and said to me, 'I believe he is asleep.'"

"'Yes, asleep,' said I. Oh! Nora, at that distance he looked asleep. Oh! why should sleep be so like Death? And then Miranda looked at him again."

"'To sleep at this hour,' she said—she said it in a disgusted sort of way. Oh! I wish she *hadn't* now. 'I do despise people,' she said, 'who have nothing to do but sleep all day. *I'll* rouse him.' She went up to him. Oh! Oh!" says Sophie, breaking off and bursting into tears afresh.

"Sophie, tell me. She—she did not——"

"Yes, she *did*," says Sophie, sobbing violently. "After that, she went up and touched his arm. She—she—*shook* him—and it was a violent, angry shake, and he—Oh! Nolly, I shall never forget, never—never. Oh! my God—he fell forward—at her feet—she *shook* him forward, and he fell at her feet, and he was dead—*dead*! It was a stone, a cold, frozen bit of flesh, that rolled over. And her scream—her scream——"

"Sophie. Sophie!"

Nora twines her arms round her, and draws her down upon a couch. Sophie buries her face in her sister's bosom, as if with a desire to shut out that last, terrible, never-to-be-forgotten sight.

"You should think, Sophie! You should take courage. Think of Miranda. Oh! what it must have been to her."

"After that last speech. Ah! she has dwelt on that," says Sophie, lifting her eyes to look round her in a nervous sort of fashion, as if expecting to see something behind her. "She has taken that to heart. I know—I know," trembling, "that if he had been alive she would have said

just the same thing, all that about his doing nothing and being an idler, you know, Nolly; but now, that he is dead! it sounds so different, doesn't it? How strange that death should make so great a difference."

"It does—it does," says Nora. "And then you went on? You went up to him?"

"Yes," shuddering afresh. "Quite up to him. Miranda, when he fell, knelt down and raised his head. I don't think *she* knew—at first—but I did. I don't know how I knew, but I did."

"And Miranda? She didn't?"

"Oh! I don't know whether she did or not. I had only the impression. I think she didn't, because she raised his head, and she didn't look frightened for a while, though afterwards—— But I knew. I," sobbing now, without tears, "*I* did, Nora. Oh!" passionately, "what *lies* people tell about death—what lies one hears about the dead looking just like life—just as usual—just like one sleeping—with a smile—a natural smile upon their lips! *He* was smiling too. At least," trembling violently now, "I suppose they would call that awful look upon his lips a smile; but it was *not* a smile, Nora. It," with a sudden clasp of her hands over her eyes, "it was a *grin*!"

Nora holds her closely to her.

"Oh, Nolly, Nolly! Don't leave me, Nolly," cries Sophie, clinging frantically to her. "Oh, *where* were you? I thought you would never come home. And Miranda went away; and then, when I couldn't stay here any longer, I thought I would go out and find you. And then you were in the hall; and I was afraid you would be frightened; but," gasping, "it is *I* who *am* frightened—I—I——"

"Come upstairs," says Nora gently, quietly, although she too is trembling. All things are reversed between them. It is Nora now who is strong—Sophie who is weak. It is Nora who is conquering herself to save her sister's strength.

"No, no," says Sophie, drawing back. "He—he is upstairs!"

"Is—he—there?" asks Nora. She shudders. It seems to herself now a very desirable thing to stay *down* stairs, but a sudden thought comes to her.

"Miranda!" says she, with quick remorseful remembrance.

"Where is she?"

"With him, I think!" nervously.

"Oh! Poor Miranda! I must go to her," says Nora.
"Come up to our room, Sophie, and I'll send some one to stay with you, while I go to look for Miranda."

"You will go—*there*?" asks Sophie, shivering.

"I shall go to the door," says Nora, in a rather quaking tone.

CHAPTER LVIII.

"Thou red-breast singest the old song over,
Though many a time thou hast sung it before;
They never sent thee to some strange new lover—
I sing a new song by my mother's door."

I stepped from my little room down by the ladder,
The ladder that never so shook before;
I was sad last night—to-day I am sadder,
Because I go from my mother's door."

THE midnight hour has struck! Slowly, slowly—surely more slowly than usual to-night, as if in decent accordance with the late terribly sudden death in the house, have the chimes from the old tower rung out the twelve solemn numbers.

Nora starts as she hears them; she pulls the curtains aside, and gazes out into the starry night.

She had persuaded Sophie to go to bed. Sophie! who was frightened, overdone, and nervous, but who had resisted the thought of bed to the last. But *at* the last she had given in, and had been undressed by Nora and tucked up in her bed by her, and is now sleeping the sleep of the just.

To Nora, on this sad night, sleep seems impossible. She had spent a long time with Miranda, and had brought her downstairs, and made her eat—and had learned from her, that she would sit up all night in the death chamber.

"He wasn't altogether a comfortable sort of body," said Miranda, mournfully. "But he might have been worse; and I'm sorry now, Nora, that I was a trifle short with him at times. After all, you know, he couldn't help it. He was born like that."

Miranda's form of regret took a queer shape, but it was sincere all the same.

Nora had comforted her a good deal by telling her that she would not go to bed either. Miranda, instead of combating that decision, had clung to it. It seemed such a

blessing that there would be one sympathetic soul in the house wide awake, to whom she could go at times, and make her remorseful moan. And "after all," as she said practically, "the loss of one night's rest never killed anybody." "After all" is a formula of Miranda's. She begins and ends most of her sentences with it.

It is late in September, and the night is chilly; the fires have been kept up all over the house; and Nora, having flung aside her gown, has put on a loose dressing gown—a warm one—a very long one—given her by Miranda, as a sort of defiance to the coming winter.

She has been wandering to and fro all night. Meeting Miranda in her own—or else in the morning room—where she had given her a cup of coffee half an hour ago, and had made her promise to lie down a bit. She looked so exhausted! Now she finds herself in the library, the cosiest room in the house, and finding it ablaze with lamps, and the fire a perfect picture, has sunk slowly into a big lounging chair.

She has almost passed from this work-a-day world into the land of dreams, when a step behind her brings her to her feet at once.

The step! She knows it!

"You—you!" stammers she, as Carnegie comes towards her, noiselessly, across the thick carpet.

"Yes! I had only just heard—I was dining out, miles away, at the O'Connors'." His manner is jerky and nervous. "But when I came home and one of the men told me, I felt I should like to come over here and see if I could help you all in some way. I thought—to see Lady Anketell."

This is a mere concession to *les convenances*—he looks as if he never wanted to see any one again but Nora.

And indeed at this moment Nora—always lovely—has touched the point of beauty perfected! Her long white robe (one of Miranda's numerous gifts, who loves to deck the girl, and so rejoice in her beauty), clinging to her pretty form, accentuates its charms. The white cachemire, and the white fur, and out of all that the soft pale face arising and the little hands, fair and pale too—and clasped—

The gown is beautiful; one a little Princess might have worn; but the face! He tells himself, silently gazing at her—

that the gown *might* be produced again, but the face never—*Never!*”

And that little touch of sleep in the sweet eyes! . . .

“Miranda is lying down,” says Nora. “I have at last induced her to try and sleep. She has been on her feet all day. She is exhausted.”

“And you——”

“Yes—I am tired!” says she simply, as if in answer to him.

“You ought to be in bed,” says he sharply. “A child like you—are they all mad, to let you stay up like this? Where is Sophie?”

“She—she is in bed too,” says Nora, and then, quickly, as though afraid of an outburst on his part—“Poor, *poor* Sophie. Did you know that she was with Miranda when—when they found him? Oh! *think* how dreadful it must have been for her. She, who had never seen death before. I made her go to bed.”

“It seems to me,”—wrathfully—“that you have sent the whole household to bed except yourself. Was there nobody to think of you?”

“Oh! I shall go. I shall lie down presently when Miranda has had a little sleep,” says she. She looks at him, lifting her lids languidly and smiles. “Oh, I shall be all right,” she says.

What lovely eyes she has! What witchery—innocent witchery—lies in them!

“Her eyes men beauty call.”

“But to be alone here—alone at this hour!” Carnegie is wrathful still.

“Oh! don’t mind me,” says she quickly. “And,” with a charming smile, “I am not alone after all, because you are with me.” The idea that perhaps he ought *not* to be with her at this hour, just because she *is* alone, never occurs to her. As a fact she is delighted to see him. He will kill her sense of loneliness whilst Miranda sleeps, and besides—well——! She has already told herself that at all events she *likes* him.

“But——” There are some qualms of conscience in Carnegie’s mind. Some dim rememberings of what ought and what ought not to be done. To be here with her, alone—at this hour.

"Oh! I know what you are going to say," says Nora, who does not know at all, growing—and looking—depressed. "But I am afraid I'm not so—so sorry as I ought to be. Oh! *Poor* Sir Fell! I know—I know all you would say. That," with a little pathetic gesture, "he was not so sympathetic towards us as he might have been. But still he is dead; and . . . I wish I could feel more about it," says she, miserably. "But it won't *come*! Miranda and Sophie have been crying all the evening, but I—I have not cried at all. I have felt frightened—dreadfully frightened, but I can't cry, so I must be without a heart, I think!" She pauses. "Do you think I have no heart?" asks she!

"What a question to ask *me*!" says Carnegie. A red flush rises to his brow. "Do you forget what you told me——?"

"About—about—Oh, yes!" stammers she. "But it was not *that* sort of heart I was thinking of. "That was a heart," slowly "to feel my own sorrows. But a heart to feel for another! Ah! that is the true heart! It seems to me," sighing, "as though I could only feel for myself. I hurt everyone—I distress everyone—and in turn,"—she moves away from him to the window and drawing aside the curtains, looks out into the night. "In turn, I myself, am hurt," says she, in a low tone.

The slight figure is turned from him, but he can see the trembling of the hand that is clasping the curtain. She looks so slight, so fragile in the long white robe—a little taller than usual, perhaps, but so very, *very* delicate.

"You have been unhappy," says he, quickly. "You have suffered, but now——" he pauses, "now, your good time is coming to you. Now you are your own mistress."

"How?" asks she, turning round as if startled, but always with her hand upon the curtain.

"Of course I know it is very little, ridiculously little," says Carnegie; "but still the money *is* your own and—I can understand that you would rather live on it than—marry a man who has no claim to your regard. I know—I know," impatiently, in answer to a sudden gesture on her part, "that you would not consider that matter now—but I shall consider it for you. I have seen all along—I have known, even when most I tried to blind myself, that you sought marriage with me merely as an escape from a worse bondage. It is hard," in a low tone, and with feeling, "to

say all I want to say with that poor old fellow dead upstairs, but—I know you were not happy in this house, and that *any* step that could tend to your removal from it, you would have been glad to take.”

“I—I—” Nora has come forward into the brilliant light of the lamps, now—her face is very pale, she makes a movement with her hand as though to check him, but he goes on determinedly :

“That step I supplied. You agreed to marry me, to escape from your life here. Life with me, you decided might be better, could”—bitterly—“not be worse, than it was here. I knew it all then, Nora, I felt it ; and I was mean enough to take you at your word, yet I entreat you to believe in this last hour between us, that I meant well to you. I meant—I swear it honestly—to make your life a dream of happiness, so far as it lay in my power to do so.” He stops—his sudden touch of passion is subdued by a powerful will. “Now, all that is over,” says he. “You have some money and—well—you need not marry me because your home is unhappy.”

Nora has let the curtain go. She comes now right across the room to where he is standing.

“You know nothing—nothing !” says she, almost fiercely, “but I shall *tell* you—I shall tell you—now !”

CHAPTER LIX.

“Were she no longer true,
 Eileen Aroon !
 What should her lover do,
 Eileen Aroon !
 Fly with his broken chain
 Far o’er the sounding main,
 Never to love again,
 Eileen Aroon !”

“YES ; all ! *All !*” says she. She is looking at him—her face like death, her eyes like stars ! The white of her gown is not whiter than her cheeks, and her lips too have lost their sweet red touch. She looks like a snow-maiden to Carnegie, a maiden waiting to be thawed by the fairy-lover—but alas ! alas, he tells himself, *he* is not the lover !

She takes a step forward, and lays her hand upon the table. It is a gesture full of meaning.

“What is there to tell ?” says Carnegie. “And to me !”

Consider ! I am out of your life from this night forth—why——”

“I wish you to know,” says she. “If this should be the last time you choose to look on me ——”

“I—I——” says Carnegie.

“Oh, what does it matter !” cries she. “*Nothing* matters, except that I want to tell you—that—that—you are wrong about my reason for accepting you. It—it had nothing to do with Sir Fell ! I—I consented to marry you, because—because he——”

Her voice dies away.

“Ferris !” icily, and drawing back from her.

“Yes . . . Cyril—because he——” she stops dead short and covers her face with her hands. “Because he—oh, it is hard to say !”

“Then don’t say it.” Carnegie has gone to her, and has laid his hands upon her shoulders. “Why make yourself miserable—and for me ? And—*now*, too ! Now,” with a slight tremble in his voice, “when I shall so soon be gone out of your life for ever.”

“You will go. You will go !” says she, lifting her head. “I know that—but still, before you go I want you to *hear*. I *must* tell you—it is only fair. I have behaved very badly to you ; I——” pausing, as if bracing herself for a great effort —“Oh, you *shall* hear ! You think I accepted you, because I wanted to escape from a step-father’s tyranny, but it was not that—I accepted you because Cyril Ferris threw me over—because he found money was of more worth than love—because—he wished to marry Mrs. Vancourt !”

Her voice rings clear to the end, but now dies away. Her face is ghastly. Yet she stands erect, her hand upon the table, her slender figure upraised, her eyes tearless.

“Now you know all,” says she. “Now—you can go.”

“You wish me to go, then ?”

He is looking at her.

“*No* ! But you !—there is no question—you wish to go ?”

“I shall give you your own answer, ‘No.’”

“But this is madness,” says Nora. “I have told you how it is, and yet——” in her excitement she comes nearer to him, as if to look more closely into his eyes.

“And yet,” repeats he calmly, steadily, though his heart

is beating wildly. "Come, let us get to the end of it, Nora. I came here to-night filled with the thought that it was the last hour I should spend beneath this roof, I had already arranged what I should do. I had decided upon Africa."

"Oh, no! Oh, no!" cries Nora involuntarily. She comes nearer to him—nearer still—she is now looking up into his face, her lips parted, her face blanched. "It—it is so far away," says she, in a tone so faint as almost to be unheard.

"Nora! Nora!" cries Carnegie. He has caught her hands, and is holding them in a clasp that must be almost hurtful; yet she says nothing. Her eyes are bent on his.

"I have no one—no one," says she, still in that same strange whisper.

It seems to conquer Carnegie—his passion dies away. He lightens his grasp upon her hands, and after a second or two, lets them fall from his grasp.

"What do you mean by that?" says he shortly.

"If you go—you are my one friend, and if you go!—"

She is trembling from head to foot, the

" Silent war of lilies and of roses,
 . . . In her fair face's field "

fights hard for mastery.

"*Don't go!*" says she.

It is the same appeal. He had heard it, or something like it, some hours ago. He stirs impatiently.

"Nora! Let us understand each other. You ask me to stay, to wait, on probation as it were. I—it is no proud thing to boast of—but I am glad to wait, to hope. But I warn you that, though I am a patient man, an end can come to my waiting. If you think there can ever be hope for me, say so *now!*"

"If," she tries to draw her hands away from him, but he holds them firmly. "Do not ask me to answer now," says she faintly.

"Yes. Now. *Now!* and at once," says he sternly. "You *must* know your own mind!"

"I don't," says she, even more faintly still. Her lids are downcast; she has ceased to try to take her hands from his. She stands half-turned away from him, with the light of the

lamp falling warmly on her bowed head, her loose, soft hair, her slight, white-robed, slender form—and his hands holding hers! compelling her, as it were, making her his own; taking possession of her!

"You shall," says he, with a strange force. "Now, *think*."

"Oh! I like you—I told you I liked you," says the girl feverishly. "I"—hesitating—"I think I am even *fond* of you."

"Ah! you shouldn't have hesitated—you spoiled it," says Carnegie, with a short, grating laugh, that badly conceals the grief and rage at his heart. "Come, Nora, let us understand each other! You want me, and you don't want me. Is that it? You want me as a friend, but not as a lover! Is that how it stands? Well, let us make an agreement! It shall be all for your good; I shall give you three months—three long months to make up your mind about me—to——"

"Three months! *Only* three months! it is such a short time," says Nora.

"To you! To *me* an eternity," says he shortly. "At all events, three months it shall be. I have warned you I am not a patient man, and yet," with sudden passion, "how I belie myself. Was there *ever* so patient a man? I endure all, I wait upon your caprices, I consent to let the happiness of my whole life lie fallow in your hands for three months, without so much as hope to sustain me . . . There!" abruptly, "Good-night!"

He turns from her and goes to the door.

"Good-night!" says she. She runs after him, and holds out her hand. Such a lovely little hand, with something so nervously friendly about it.

"What am I to do with this?" says Carnegie, taking it in a rather careful fashion, and examining it. Certainly it is worth examination. It is a gem of its kind. Perhaps its beauty, the very slenderness of it, appeals to him—in spite of himself. "What *could* one do with it but *this*," says he, bending and pressing his lips to it.

He laughs. There is a good deal of bitterness in his laugh, and of self-contempt even more!

CHAPTER LX.

" Though he should sue thee now,
Ere a ruin,
 Heed not his traitor vow,
Ere a ruin,
 When did'st thou e'er believe,
 When his false words receive,
 But sorely thou did'st grieve,
Ere a ruin ?"

TIME, the fickle, the unsociable, never stays with us. It has flown of late with all too eager haste, and already winter is upon us—winter, with its thousand discontents. Last night it snowed, and to-day is "dark and dreary," and of a very threatening aspect.

Those three specified months of probation have drawn to a close. Time with them is "up," most mercilessly up to date indeed; and Carnegie, with a stern determination to face without delay what may be in store for him, is buttoning his driving coat over a somewhat sinking heart, having made up his mind to go down to Dunmore this morning, to learn his fate, once for all.

It so happens that someone else as well as he has elected to put his fortune

" To the touch,
 To gain or lose it all."

Ferris had run down to the Castle last night. It is his first visit there since that evening, when he renounced Nora and love, for Mrs. Vancourt and money. He had gone to England after that, and had seen a good deal of Mrs. Vancourt, perhaps more than he cared for; so *much* more indeed, that when he heard of Sir Fell's death—news that did not reach him for quite a month after the event—he began to dwell, irresolutely at first and then more constantly, more persistently, more longingly, on the thought that Nora was now free from parental control, and so was her money. It was but a small sum truly, but Ferris, who possessed the soul of a confirmed gambler, believed that once in possession of five thousand pounds, he could make a fortune out of it by careful speculation. And, at all events, it would be better than a lifetime with Eldon.

He told himself Eldon need know nothing about it until afterwards—until he had assured himself that the five thousand pounds was to be had without any tiresome legal transactions. As for Nora ! Well ! he *knew* he could count on her.

Her engagement to Carnegie had, of course, reached him. Mrs. Vancourt had indeed been only too maliciously glad to tell him of it. But in his present calculations he took no heed of that. He put it behind him, out of his mind altogether, as a thing of no consequence ! He regarded himself in such a sufficiently good light as to enable him to believe that, once having loved him, the girl must necessarily love him always ; and to throw over Carnegie seemed to him as easy a matter for her, as for him to throw over Eldon Vancourt.

He feels as sure of Nora's constancy as of the sky above him, and if Eldon's constancy has seemed quite as certain, still, really, Eldon has grown too intolerable of late. Even to be poor, or comparatively poor (he has always that possible, speculative fortune in his mind), with Nora, would be better than to be the proud possessor of the "stalled ox" with Eldon Vancourt.

Strangely enough, his frequent intercourse with Mrs. Vancourt in the houses of her friends, and in her own beautiful home, has only tended to waken within him all his old first deep attachment to Nora. The contrast had been great, but he was sufficient artist at soul to see where the real loveliness lay—and the very separation from Nora, the knowledge that he had of his own accord pushed her out of his life, had sharpened his desire for her.

And even if the speculation on that five thousand pounds failed, it need not be starvation diet all through ! Lord Saggartmore would stand to him—would get him a berth somewhere. And even if he had to work (that would mean work, of course, *af a sort*), why, better to work in a mild, gentlemanly way, than sit in the lap of idleness all day—especially if the lap was to be that of Eldon Vancourt. It occurred to him that *hers* would be a thorny lap, and decidedly uncomfortable.

Still, it would not do to break with Eldon altogether. Better the "stalled ox" than nothing !

* * * * *

It is with all these thoughts in his admirable mind, that

he enters the drawing-room at Dunmore to find Nora there—alone.

She rises. She looks at him ; a strange terrible look ! Oh ! how the past comes back on her. Yet, after that first wild look, something seems to die away within her—What ? What ? She cannot tell herself what it is.

She has been thinking of Ferris a good deal for the past week.

She could not help thinking of him as those fatal three months drew to their close.

And now, to *see* him ! She had believed him miles away—across the Channel—very far away from Dunmore.

She stands staring at him, so far lost in a hateful retrospection that she forgets to give him her hand in greeting.

He—superficial always—mistakes her breach of manners.

“ Ah ! you have not forgotten—you do not forgive ? ” says he.

Nora, in her black gown, is looking beautiful. The sombre hue of her gown throws out all the exquisite tints of her complexion.

“ It is not that,” says she slowly.

“ You are surprised to see me. Yes—I know. But I can explain——”

He pauses—pleased, glad, because of the undeniable agitation that shakes her. Surely all this augurs well for him.

“ Explain ? ” questions she. She has grown strangely calm all at once. It is as though a wave of feeling has swept over her and left her sane, cold, shivering.

“ Nora ! you *cannot* have forgotten how we parted ? ”

“ No. I do not forget ! ” says she. Her tone is tinged with a terrible bitterness ! She can hardly recognise it as her own ! How changed it is. She is thinking—thinking ! That last parting ! Has *he* forgotten, that he thus dares to remind her of it ?

Had she ever loved him ? ever really loved him ? Oh ! surely that old past torment meant love ; and yet—Had he always looked like that ? with those shifting handsome eyes ?

She draws back from him. Her breath comes quickly. All at once she seems to be looking into other eyes—calm, steady, earnest eyes !

With a suspicion of disgust in her gesture, she waves him from her.

“ What has brought you here ? ” asks she.

"Can you ask? What a question from you to me!" says he vehemently. His vehemence is a little forced; he is trying to read her face. "Of course I came when I heard of——"

"I have heard too," says she, interrupting him slowly; "I have heard of your engagement——"

"My engagement——?"

"To Mrs. Vancourt."

"Damn Mrs. Vancourt!" says he furiously—the girl's air, that is almost imperious, and is quite contemptuous, maddening him. "See here, Nora," says he. "What is Mrs. Vancourt to us—to you or me? You cannot have pushed me out of your mind so soon—out of your heart! You *cannot* have forgotten our past—those evenings down by the river—by the old bridge—you——"

"Do you wish me to remember?" asks she, her soul sinking within her. Oh! those past evenings! Oh! that she could blot out the remembrance of them for ever. What a charm they once had for her—and now where is even the vaguest perfume of that charm? Gone——

What sort of man is this? What coarse fibres run through his frame! Yet, once he had been her idol! Oh! the agony of the moment in which she knows at *last* that her idol is but built of the very basest clay!

"*What* am I to remember?" she bursts out suddenly, a very torrent of passion overcoming her. "Your falseness—your treachery—the giving up of your soul for money—the base forsaking of love——? Truly you have your wish. I *do* remember!"

"This is revenge," says he, very pale.

"Ah! no!" with terrible sadness. "It is only that I must remember, and that I *can't* forget!"

"That you won't forgive, rather. But you will in time, Nora! You will—you *must*! *Give* me time!" His tone is impassioned. Never even in the old days had he seemed so lover-like, so altogether at her feet. He has indeed forgotten everything—every mercenary thought—every worldly consideration—for the moment). He sees only the perfect beauty of her small, scornful face, the deadly coldness of her sweet, contemptuous eyes! Now, in this hour when she repels him, she is sweeter far to his mean soul than in those other hours when she had given him the first-fruits of her tender heart.

"You don't know what you are doing," says he; his vehemence is not forced now. "To-morrow you will know, and you will regret. But let yourself know regret. It will bring you back to me. For you do love me, Nora—you do—think—think of the past—only a few months ago!"

She shakes her head. He goes to her now and would have taken her hand, but something in her face checks him. What he could hardly have said, it is so calm, so quiet, so immovable.

"Ah! you are angry still," says he. "And—I confess it—I was wrong—but what was I to do? I, penniless, and you—— But I shall be more generous to you than you to me. I shall give *you* time. I shall come back to-morrow—you will know then—you——"

"Do not come back to-morrow," says she in the tone that suits the strange, fresh quiet of her face.

"You are hard!" says he. His belief in her love for him still, is almost fatuous. "Who would have thought so cruel a heart could dwell in so sweet a body? You——" He pauses. "You will marry me, Nora?"

Her heart seems suddenly to tighten. It is the very first time in all their intercourse that he has asked her directly to marry him. It was always naturally understood that they should marry some day, but the actual question had never been put till now.

"No," says she in a stifled tone. "No."

"No!"

"I shall never marry you! Never! I made a mistake once! I shall not make it again!"

"Nora!"

"It is useless—useless!" says she, putting up her hand as if to check further speech on his part. "I shall never marry you!"

"I won't believe you!" cries he violently; "you don't know what you are doing! You—you know you loved me, Nora—a long time ago—and love—they tell us it is eternal! You *do* love me still!"

"As for that! Ah! No!" says the girl very sadly. "All that is dead—dead. If love be eternal, then perhaps I never loved you—*really*!" Her eyes as she looks at him are full of tears.

"If you feel it like that," cries he triumphantly, "do you think I cannot see that it is *not* dead? Come"—going up

to her, and taking both her hands in his—"I dare you say to me, It is dead!"

Nora looks at him. Such a strange look. "It is you who have said it," declares she slowly. "Yes, It is dead—dead!"

"What folly!" says Ferris. His tone is a little wild. Never has his heart grown so warm towards her as now, in this, his last hour with her. Something within warns him that it *is* his last hour! A very passion of longing for her grows within his breast.

"Nora—darling—beloved—listen to me," entreats he.

"To what use—what is to come of it?" coldly.

"Still listen—you *shall*!" says he suddenly.

"Listen to what?" says Nora, "to a hideous mockery of a love, in which you would have made me believe?"

"They have been lecturing you, I see," says Ferris, with that sneer she so well remembers—she can even recollect that once she had admired it—had thought it charming, had noticed the aristocratic touch it gave to lip and nostril! What a *fool* she had been! She could have laughed aloud, a terrible laugh, as she brings it all back to her. "But if they lectured for ever, Nora, they could not move us. We are each to each—the whole world; yes, deny it if you will, but——"

"Oh! *don't*," says Nora; she turns quickly. "Why prolong this?" says she. "Tell me one thing—one thing only. Are you—are you not, at this moment, engaged to Mrs. Vancourt?"

She waits for his reply. He hesitates. It is but a moment of hesitation, but her contempt cannot endure it.

"Answer me!" repeats she imperiously.

"And what if I were?" says he boldly. "Yes it is true! When I found I dare not plunge you—you whom I loved—into poverty I—well, I went mad, I think—and I told Eldon Vancourt that I would marry her."

"Oh, what a way to speak of her," says Nora. She shrinks from him as though she were Eldon Vancourt in person.

"She's a perfect devil," says Mr. Ferris imperturbably. "Don't let your mind dwell on her. She is nothing to me. The moment I knew you were free—the moment I learned your step-father was dead, I came to you. I thought of nothing *but* you. You have some little fortune, I believe,

but that is nothing to me—I want you—you only. You *must* believe that. You accuse me of loving Eldon Vancourt, yet you can see it is hateful to me to have to put that accusation into words, but you must see that what you have—what your fortune is—is but a drop in the ocean compared with what Eldon has. And yet, I come to you. Therefore”—triumphantly—“it must be plain to you that I love you, and you only!”

The last vestige of colour flies from Nora's face. Oh, the hideous coarseness of it all. The laying bare of everything that is of the most sacred. At this moment she realizes the fact that she *hates* him. Hates this handsome, paltry, vulgar man, who has the face of an Adonis, and the soul of a brute!

All her former love for him lies dead now—dead and fit only for putting out of sight! Oh! that the burial of it may be *soon*.

“Why do you stand there, looking at me like that?” says he. “So coldly, as if——Nora, speak to me!”

“What can I say? There is nothing,” says Nora.

“Oh! There is! There must be! Are you stone? Because I once failed, will you now deny me all—even one little corner in your heart. Nora, you *shall* hear me!” He catches her arms suddenly, and so holds her, gazing into her eyes, as if to compel the return of her love.

“Let me go,” says she in a low tone, yet one full of horror. “Do you hear? Let me go!”

“Not until you listen—not until you——”

“I shall not listen,” says she, still in that same low, curious voice. “Your touch—your very *touch*—is hateful to me! I desire you to——”

“Ah! It was not hateful once,” says he, forgetting all things, even his manhood, in his passion, his rage, his fear of losing her.

“Let me go!” cries she fiercely.

It is at this moment that the door is thrown open, and Carnegie enters the room.

* * * * *

CHAPTER LXI.

"Sweeter 'tis to gaze upon
 My Nora's lid that seldom rises ;
 Few its looks, but every one,
 Like unexpected light, surprises.
 Oh ! my Nora Creina, dear,
 My gentle, bashful Nora Creina,
 Beauty lies
 In many eyes,
 But love in yours, my Nora Creina !

NORA is the first to see him ! He looks so tall, so strange, that her heart dies within her. He shuts the door with a certain force, and strides up to her—a terrible look on his face. A sense of faintness overpowers Nora. She even forgets to withdraw the hand lying cold in Cyril's. That look in Carnegie's face has frozen her.

By this time Carnegie is face to face with her. She wrenches her hand free from Cyril's at last, and steps back a little.

"What am I to understand by this ?" demands Carnegie, addressing himself solely to her. At this moment he could have killed her. "Traitor ! traitress !" His heart is crying aloud.

"It means," says Ferris boldly, "that I have been renewing my proposals to Miss Carew."

"Answer me, Nora !" says Carnegie, his eyes blazing. He ignores Ferris as completely as though Ferris were in the next county. "What does this mean ?"

"I told him——" begins Nora. She grasps the back of the chair near her. Carnegie's face has frightened her.

"You told him—*what ?*"

"That—that I——"

Carnegie turns from her contemptuously.

"You are free !" says he. "Quite free. You know that !" His tone is clear and stern. "You have made your choice, I see."

Nora, with a face snow-white, comes suddenly forward. She would have spoken if she could ; but words fail her. Nature helps her ! Nature compels her to throw out her arms to him.

"No, no, no !" gasps she, speech at last returning to

her. "Stay! Stay! Don't leave me! I,"—with a last, wild effort—"I shall *die* if you leave me!"

Carnegie catches her. Such a little, fragile, lovely body. He strains her to his heart! His face grows transfigured. Such a great, strong light was never seen as grows in his eyes.

"My darling! My sweetheart! My *own* girl!"

Nora clings to him. She is sobbing wildly now.

"Oh! tell him to go! To go away! To go away, for *ever*! Her sobs are growing wilder. "I don't want ever to see him again. Tell him to *go*!"

"Oh! hush—*hush*!" says Carnegie, pressing her head with one hand against his heart, as if to silence her. With the other he makes an imperious gesture towards Ferris.

It is not necessary, however. Ferris, with the air of a beaten hound, goes to the door, passes it, and also the door of Nora's life—for *ever*!

Nora presently lifts her head, and glances fearfully around her.

"He is gone?" says she. "*Is* he gone?" Again she looks round her. Yes; the coast is clear! "Oh! I'm glad," cries she, drying her eyes instantly, and recovering at least a portion of her old spirits; spirits that have deserted her now for many a day. "Oh! I *am* glad!" cries she, laughing nervously.

"*Honestly* glad, Nora?" He is looking at her very earnestly.

"I hope—I hope," says she, standing back from him, and crossing both hands upon her bosom, "that I shall never see him again." Something in his face disturbs her now, and she runs to him. "Oh! I hate him. I do, indeed. You—you have shewn it all to me. You are so different! You——" She shrinks away from him, her little, sweet face paling. "Perhaps you—do not love *me* now!"

"What does that mean, Nora?" says he, following her and taking her into his arms. "That you love *me* now? Say that! Say it, my beloved."

"I do—I do," says Nora, clinging to him. "But you? I often wonder why you don't hate me. And perhaps you do. Do you remember that last day—oh! a long time ago—the day on the hill? You said then—something that hurt me!"

"I said then many things that were unpardonable. Things I have scourged myself for since!"

"Ah! but there was *one* thing. I have never forgotten it. It has haunted me ever since."

"What was it, my darling?"

"It was—you said——"

"Said *what*? my soul?" He is holding her fast in his arms.

"That you would never," bursting into tears, "be angry with me again! Oh! it seemed to put me so *far* away from you."

"Nora, Nora!"

"Oh! do—do promise," sobs Nora wildly, "to be angry with me very *soon* again!"

"I'll promise," says Carnegie; to his everlasting chagrin be it acknowledged that he is now consumed with a desire for laughter. "I'll promise to be angry with you every day of my life, if that will add to your happiness. Oh! my little darling, darling girl, what would I *not* do to make you happy?"

"You needn't do anything," says she smiling. She has dried up her tears on *his* handkerchief, and is now quite radiant again. After all, it was only a summer shower.

"Well, but I want to do something," says he. "And I've been thinking about Sophie and Denis. They are going to be married next month, are they not?"

"Yes; and they are so happy," says Nora. She laughs, as if at some secret thought. "You never saw any two people so happy," says she.

"Never?" Carnegie looks at her—there is reproach, longing, inquiry in his eyes.

"Well, any *four* people," says she, at last, in a little smiling, abashed sort of way.

"How sweet you are, Nora! How *perfect*!" says he. He catches her in his arms. "But about Sophie. Denis and she will not be so very well off, will they?"

"No; I'm afraid not. Though I hear he has had a brief or two since last he was in Town. You know he only ran down the day before yesterday. He even skipped his Christmas. He is working very hard; but it takes time——"

"Yes; a great deal of time. And in between a rising young barrister must live, and so must his wife. It has occurred to me, Nora, that as you and I shall be—well, tolerably well off, you might as well make your sister a

wedding present of that five thousand pounds that belongs to you."

"To give that to Sophie!" Nora raises herself out of his arms, and looks up at him. "*You* thought of that?" says she. "You!"

"Yes. And you?"

"Oh! I've thought of it too, and often," says she, her eyes filling with tears. But it is yours now, and——"

"*Mine?*"

"Yes; because—I am yours," says she, in a low tone, but with a little, swift, sweet, upward glance at him.

Carnegie looks at her. A quick delight floods his face.

"Fancy *you* saying that," says he. He pauses and draws her to him. Then: "You mean it?"

Nora nods, flushing warmly, delicately.

"Well, but—*say it!*" says he.

"Say what?"

"That you are mine?"

The flush grows deeper, and her eyes sink to the ground. Her hands stir nervously within his.

"I am yours!" says she, in the lowest of all low tones.

"With all your heart and soul?"

He still questions her, holding her hand, and reading her downcast face.

Suddenly she looks up.

"With all my heart and soul," says she fervently. "Oh! *Believe* me."

"I do. I believe you for now and for ever," says Carnegie. He stoops and kisses her gravely, almost solemnly, on brow, and eyes, and lips!

* * * * *

A last word about Ferris! It so happened that Mrs. Vancourt heard about his attempt to throw her over and marry Nora. It maddened her to that extent that she threw him over, and accepted an old and impecunious baronet a month later. What became of Ferris is not known. But everybody knows how happy Nora is. There is only one married woman now in all the world who can rival her in happiness, and that is—Mrs. Butler.

THE END.



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